

Eudocia

By
EDEN PHILLPOTTS

EVANDER
GREEN ALLEYS
ORPHAN DINAH
MISER'S MONEY
THE GREY ROOM
A SHADOW PASSES
STORM IN A TEACUP
THE BANKS OF COLNE
PLAIN SONG, 1914-1916
CHRONICLES OF SAINT TID
THE HUMAN BOY AND THE WAR

E u d o c i a

(A Comedy Royal)

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

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FOREWORD

No historical value attaches to this romance, for one has but taken half a page from Gibbon and elaborated the good story against its gorgeous background—a Court as magnificent to the eye as contemptible to the heart of man. By its own momentum the huge organisation of the Eastern Empire rolled on for certain centuries after the reign of Eudocia and Romanus, though the fabric of the mass had long begun to shed its substance and the axe was at the root.

History is but a reverberation; and the forces that brought down the Byzantines similarly combined against all earlier civilisations and will resolve all later. We have seen them operating in this our time, raising new kingdoms and destroying old, through the dynamic genius of an irrational humanity that changes not. Only reason can secure and endure stability; but reason has yet to find her place in the sun of man's favour; no kings or peoples bring gold and frankincense to that cradle. The comedy is not, therefore, archaic; but read in the light of to-day, alive—at least in spirit.

E. P.

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CHAPTER I

THE PALACE

EUDOCIA

CHAPTER I

THE PALACE

§ 1

AT Constantinople, during the year one thousand and sixty-seven, a great apartment in that quarter of the royal palace known as “Daphne” was set for an assemblage. Widowed Eudocia reigned alone at this moment, and she better liked the “Daphne” than those huge and brazen and echoing vaults of “Chalce,” where bygone monarchs had dispensed Byzantine justice, or injustice, through the centuries.

Daphne’s throne was set amid a semicircle of lower seats and lighted by a rainbow dome of many-coloured crystal. Behind the regal cushion, in an alabaster wall, there stood doors of silver, whereon was chased the story of victorious wars;

to the west of the council chamber ascended a row of slender pillars, and beyond them opened a broad piazza, shielded from the noon sunshine by awnings of russet and gold. Here, on marble, spread the skins of bear and tiger, lay scattered silken cushions—orange red, azure, and ivory-white—and stood couches of ebony, gemmed with mother-o'-pearl and onyx. In the midst a fountain played out of a round basin overlaid with gold. Trees waved their topmost branches along the balustrades of this uplifted balcony, and behind the dusky glitter of ilex and the feathers of phoenix palms there spread the silver-shot waters of Marmora; while beyond, separating sea and sky, lay southward in a purple cloud the lands of Lesser Asia.

A flight of steps rose from the gardens to the balcony, and now there ascended a boy and a little withered man with a face like a monkey. He was clad fantastically, as became a jester, and his dwarfish body shone in a doublet of green silk slashed with scarlet. Upon his grey hair he wore a velvet bonnet with a great bronze brooch in it; his shrunken legs were gartered white over black.

“Lizard,” cried the child, flinging himself among the cushions, “make me laugh. I am tired of my book.”

He dropped a little manuscript bound in tortoise-shell and turned to his attendant. Saurus, or the "Lizard," for none knew him by another name, had been a jester at the Court of Constantine, and now was nurse and watcher to the dead monarch's son, Michael. For Eudocia loved the mannikin and trusted the prince with him; while Michael Ducas himself, precarious heir to the throne, generally found happiness in the companionship of the ancient creature.

The child spoke in a querulous voice, like the whimper of a young hawk. His black hair was cut straight across his forehead above a pair of black eyebrows and eyes dark brown and beautiful. These he had won of his mother; but his face was feminine in feature and his pretty, red mouth seemed rather made for kisses than commands. He was emotional and impetuous. Already he loved and hated heartily; already he hungered to know more than was good for him and strove to win state secrets from Eudocia's women, or herself. He wore a jerkin of purple, and on his small brown hands and leathern shoes sparkled many a gem.

"Won't your book make you laugh, Prince?" inquired the dwarf, as he sank to rest in the shade beside the boy and took off his cap.

"It's all about dead people," answered Michael Ducas; "and when I laugh I think: 'But these who make me laugh are dead.' And then I can laugh no more. I hate death—I hate it."

Saurus shook his head.

"Better to laugh along with jolly dead men than weep with the sad living," he answered. "Small matter makes for laughter in these days. Every twilight holds a trouble, and some are grown so big and brave, they'll soon fright the noonday sunlight. Dark deeds are brewing and dark history making."

"I'll love you no more, Lizard," cried the boy. "You croak like an old raven to me and keep your fun for others."

"A man may hide from the wise and prudent his worst, or best thoughts, and reveal them to babes, my Prince."

"I'm not a babe. My mother said but yesterday I was growing very wise. A prince is always wise. If you must croak, then croak the truth. I order you, Lizard. I know there is trouble even at Court. I see trouble in the people's eyes, and their lips whisper."

"It is your friend, Nicephorus. Alas for us all!"

his sun is sinking, Michael. Soon he will be gone, and in the sunset flames of such a mighty one, even the Evening Star herself may lose her light."

"Nicephorus! He loves my mother best of all," said Michael.

"Would that she knew it, Prince."

"She knows everything."

"False knowledge slays the true," murmured Saurus. "Her ear's abused. The Cæsar——"

Michael interrupted him.

"Uncle John loves mother, too. He was my father's right hand, she says."

"A hand, perhaps; but Cæsar never had a head," answered the little man thoughtfully.

Michael stared aghast at such audacious words.

"You'll lose your own head, Lizard, if you dare say such things. Is not Uncle John wise?"

"He is kind and good and honest and loyal, Prince; but he has ears, and at them, they who buzz loudest win to the chambers of his royal brain. The Patriarch and Psellus——"

Again Michael broke in.

"I hate Xiphilin—I hate him! And I hate Michael Psellus more. I will never read his books, for they are sure to be full of lies. I often wish I

were not called 'Michael,' because that name belongs to him as well."

"Think only of the good Archangel, Prince."

"Michael Psellus makes my blood run cold when his eyes look at me, Lizard. They eat me. I know he would gobble me up like a wolf if he could."

Saurus was interested.

"Children and dogs seldom err—so they say. They have a gift to read their enemies. Psellus and the most reverend Xiphilin hold the Cæsar safe—safe in the hollow of their hands, Michael. Your royal uncle, John Ducas, is honest, but he has no imagination—an apt tool for dishonest men who have plenty. The future all belongs to Xiphilin, our Patriarch; and not only shall he hold the keys of hell and heaven, Prince, but his supreme word may soon be shutting and opening our prisons and our palaces on earth. He is hungrier for power than Satan."

Michael snorted indignantly.

"Black-bearded pig! Does dear Nicephorus know that the Patriarch and Psellus are his foes, Lizard?"

"Aye, he knows well enough."

"Be it as it may, my mother is the Empress and needs none to help her, though ministers fret and

quarrel," said the child; but Saurus shook his head.

"On God's good earth there's but one weaker than an Emperor, and that's an Empress, Michael."

"How dare you say that? My mother would chop out your wicked tongue if she heard you."

"None knows it better than she; and better still will know it when Nicephorus has fallen."

He sighed, put his face in his hands, then lifted it and spoke again.

"Nicephorus was her sword, and they have whispered to her that Roman blade is poisoned. Even his friends, who wish him no more than peace—even they tell Eudocia that his edge is blunt from a lifetime of service, and must now hide in a dishonourable sheath. What a race are we—we Byzantines! When we would punish a mighty one for ever fallen from power, what do we do, young Michael?"

"Put out his eyes, and cut off his nose and his ears," answered the child promptly.

"That is our strenuous custom," admitted Saurus; "but sometimes we choose a more Christian way, and leave him his eyes, to find the road to heaven, and spare his ears, that he may heed the

message of the Church and save his soul. Such subjects of royal clemency go to the priesthood, with a snug monastery for their prison-house. Yet is it well, think you, that a servant of kings, flung down for crime against the Empire, should, for his disgrace and scourge and punishment, be made a minister of the Most High?"

But the boy quailed before a vision, and was not concerned with the general problem.

"Nicephorus turned into a monk with shaven head!" he cried; "his white hair cropped off his skull. Mother could not——"

"The Cæsar is convinced; the Senate go with him."

"But he is good, I tell you, Lizard. The Cæsar is very good. Was he not my own father's brother?"

"Granted, Prince; and none judges goodness so shrewdly as a knave, or quicklier uses the goodness of a good man to better his own wickedness. Damascus steel must keep its temper, though in a villain's hand."

"Listen to me, old Lizard. My mother is the soul of all things good, and cannot she and Uncle John make of their goodness strength to save Nicephorus?"

“When good meets good, evil often follows, Prince.”

But the boy denied it.

“Now you lie, Lizard, for I have a book that says two rights cannot make a wrong.”

“Then burn your book,” answered the jester. “Your book is the liar, not I. All history, all knowledge prove they can. Meant not they well who forced the hemlock on Socrates and crucified the world’s Saviour for blasphemy? Meant not they well——?”

He broke off, for two men had entered the Daphne from a minor door.

“See who come here—one a well-meaner—and one——”

Michael had risen and run to the shorter of the approaching figures. Both were attired for a session of Court, but while Michael Psellus, the historian and statesman, wore few jewels upon the rich amber and russet of his gaberdine, John Ducas displayed about his short, full-bodied and unimposing person the decorations of the Cæsar, his green shoon and open tiara. His frock was stiff with gems, and he sought a chair and passed a silken handkerchief over his fat and kindly face, as his nephew hastened into his arms. For a moment

anxiety left the Cæsar's countenance: he smiled upon the child and only lost his smile when he heard young Michael speak.

"Uncle John, dear Uncle John, what terrible sad thing is this I hear? Oh, say it isn't true."

"True things are terrible and sad sometimes, my pretty one," answered Ducas, sighing.

"But Nicephorus—the Lizard tells me that dear, dear Nicephorus must shave his head."

"Or lose his head," replied Michael Psellus. He was a tall, thin man with an aquiline face and lofty brow. His hands were long and beautiful, but they were restless and seemed to be always itching for the stylus. Men feared him, as all who wrote were feared at that time; but the Cæsar esteemed him for a fountain of wisdom and entertained no suspicion of his loyalty.

"Perhaps a lesser evil," snapped Saurus, who feared none and hated the man of letters.

Whereupon Psellus flashed lightning on the ancient imp.

"Guard your lips wiser, fool," he answered. "It is well for you no priest heard that."

Meantime John Ducas listened to his nephew.

"And so Michael turns to business of the State?" he asked, stroking the boy's sleek hair.

"There's none like him—none like splendid

Nicephorus in all the world," vowed Michael, while the Cæsar grew grave.

"Indeed I hope not, nephew. Get you back to your books and games; and you, Saurus, entertain his young ears with sweeter stuff than politics. Keep his heart clean and his forehead free a little longer."

"Nicephorus will fight," cried Michael in a passion. "He will fight you, Psellus; and I, too, will fight against you."

"Be wise and only fight your enemies, not your friends, most noble Sir," answered Psellus, smiling.

"And so you shall fight," promised the Cæsar, "and buckle on a good sword, when your young body is stout enough to bear it. Now begone. The Court assembles here."

"Come, Prince," begged Saurus; and Michael, still heaving with childish anger, loitered away to the steps.

"I want my mother," he said petulantly, as he disappeared with his grotesque guardian.

§ 2

Upon the boy's departure, Cæsar and Psellus proceeded with a conversation into which he had broken.

"It is done as I have declared to you," said John Ducas, "—well done, but painfully done. The Empress is now convinced, and the issue of the trial upon our evidence can only be his destruction. She was upset. Nicephorus enjoyed my brother's trust for so many years, and she has long regarded him as her pillar and stand-by. But Eudocia is just. He must fall, for he will not deny the charge. She knows that it is not my fault; and yet in her eyes I see our old friendship strained a little."

"That was bound to be. A woman always finds it hardest to forgive those who lay bare her errors."

But the Cæsar shook his head.

"She committed no error. The thing that Nicephorus has done was hidden from her until I revealed it. It was but the natural attitude our human nature is prone to take towards the bringer of ill news. For a moment we associate messengers and their tidings. Well she knows that she and her little son are very near my heart. The State alone is nearer. Do you mark this new jewel in my neck chain? The heaviest emerald known on earth. Eudocia must needs give it me upon my birthday."

Psellus scanned the amazing gem, but showed no admiration. His thoughts ran on.

“You’re a genius,” he said. “Much I feared that Eudocia would resist us at the last, and cleave to him against all report.”

“Not mine the credit,” answered the other, stroking his emerald with a fat forefinger. “Proof is proof, and Xiphilin’s word it was that drove home the charge. The Patriarch pleaded subtly with her and showed the increasing danger.”

Psellus nodded.

“It is not only Nicephorus, but what must follow his fall! Had she not the wit to look ahead, count the cost, and guess the sequel?”

“No; nor I the heart to show it her,” answered the Cæsar. “Yet, perchance she saw,” he continued, again wiping the perspiration from his round brow. “There’s little she cannot mark with those wonderful eyes. They may look as far into the future as our own.”

“Ours see a goal that Eudocia will not love, for she’s proud. But the Nation was never less a toy for a woman than to-day. Nicephorus pandered to her.”

“I would not say so. She has had to thank you largely for her education, Michael Psellus, and you have never denied her to be an apt pupil. Eudocia

is wise and has served a stern apprenticeship. My brother, Constantine, owned some philosophy, and imparted it to his young wife."

"Not such philosophy as she will need now, however," answered Psellus. "Granted her gifts, her light is out; and the late Emperor is to be thanked for that."

"How so? You deal ever in enigmas," replied John Ducas somewhat warmly.

"No enigma, great Cæsar. Did not Constantine ordain for her the widow's portion under sacred oath? But Byzantine queens, if queens they still would be, need husbands. So she departs, whither we know, and he—young Michael—and yourself jointly share the throne. Thus only is your dynasty guarded. Your royal brother foresaw as much when he imposed the oath upon her in his dying hour."

"I never held it so."

"Great Prince, you must hold it so," answered the other firmly. "Those sworn to your service may speak without fear of being misunderstood. Then what is the truth? A Cæsar in these times may lose his eyes as swiftly as a slave. For you, to-day, John Ducas, the throne's the safest place—perhaps the only place of safety."

The royal man puffed out his breath impatiently and his forehead showed a frown.

“I loathe conspiracy,” he answered; and Psellus ran on in level accents:

“Why call it that? To ingeminate healthy change is not conspiracy, but rather patriotism. The State has crying need of you, and you of it; though you better love the cares of mart and field. United with imperial power, you stand; divided, who knows? But this we know: none may be separated from his destiny.”

“I fear, Psellus; I fear.”

“There’s nothing to be feared but dalliance and shirking of duty, Cæsar. I am used to read men—it is my business as chronicler—and I know you better than you know yourself. You cannot fear. And remember that the Church has spoken clearly. Xiphilin is of my mind. Indeed his inspiration showed the inevitable way.”

“It were none the less better—a thousand times better—if she might wed again,” answered the brother-in-law of the Empress; and then it was the part of Michael Psellus to reveal impatience.

“‘If’—‘if’—” he said. “We cannot waste our brains with ‘ifs,’ royal Sir. They’re doubtful slaves at best and fatal stumbling blocks to action.

That matter is settled for ever—as unutterably fixed as the rooted corner stone of our walls. She, the Queen, beside her dying husband, took oath to wed no more. The Patriarch heard her vow, and it is written on parchment and shrined within St. Sophia's—to last till Doom. To her dead husband and her living God she is a widow for ever, and, being so, must yield the throne to her son and you. The dynasty demands that sacrifice, if sacrifice it be."

"I love her, Psellus," answered the elder. "Not for her bearing only, but her pride, her grace, her joy of life. Is it not hard that such a royal spirit, such a rich soul, should doff the robe she wears so well, yield up the sceptre and steal away to some sad, holy nook to eat her heart out?"

But Psellus was no sentimentalist.

"You speak as a relative, not a statesman, when you ask me that," he answered. "A Cæsar must banish domestic predilections. One Empress less and one nun more is little matter in a nation's story. Let women reign over women if they will, not over half the world. She was not born in the Porphyry."

Cæsar changed the subject.

"Does Nicephorus know that his hour has struck?" he asked.

"Well enough. The Court is full of spies. Where

the corn is, the vermin are not far off. Was sentence hinted at? Did Xiphilin touch it?"

"Yes—the Church—a monastery where he best pleases."

Psellus showed disappointment.

"Nicephorus is safer in his grave," he answered. "A man may doff the hooded robe as easily as he puts it on; but he cannot put on his head again."

"Her trust is dead," answered John Ducas; "yet, for old time's sake, she will never take his life. A tender memory often rides over present wrong, to weaken policy and soften judgment. Be warned. Urge no capital punishment nor bodily outrage upon Nicephorus, or you will lose her friendship. He must go to the cloister—no hardship that for one of his philosophy and contemplative spirit."

"'Philosophy,'" sneered the writer. "Is it philosophy to wait on the event and never stir until a thing has happened? In statecraft, or life-craft, who but a fool does that, knowing the time we waste is not wasted by our enemies?"

"There are spirits too great for politics, that cry so loudly always for instant deeds," replied the other wearily. "Only a small mind knows how to make itself up quickly, and too much brain often begets too little action."

"In these days your waiting, watching intellect

breeds death," answered Michael Psellus. "An open mind at our helm will wreck the shuddering ship, for each wave may be the last."

As he spoke figures ascended from the palace gardens; a cross of gold flashed and came forward, where three acolytes walked abreast; while behind them followed two priests and Xiphilin, the Patriarch of the East.

He was a square-built, solid man, clad in a black robe unadorned save for a cross of precious stones upon his bosom. He wore a black hat without a brim, and his remarkable face was swarthy, round and heavily bearded. His eyes shone with a bold and fierce lustre, his heavy nose was hooked, his beautiful voice rang like a clarion and spoke of birth and breeding. For Xiphilin was a Patrician —one who had abjured the privileges of his rank and entered the Church, to seek therein higher power than a neglected and impotent nobility could offer. Ambition burned in his eyes, and from his supreme, sacerdotal eminence he already sought nearer worlds than heaven to conquer. At the age of five and forty he had reached the Patriarchal throne, to find a thorn; for the gulf that separated the formidable sovereignty of a Western Pope from an Eastern Patriarch, making the latter a small

figure by comparison, tortured Xiphilin in his sleeping and waking hours. Under the Eastern constitution he must remain a servant of the Throne, and any servitude was poison to his soul. Now his constructive and restless mind had entered into court intrigue and he held that the Church, for her own welfare and the nation's salvation, must aid the State at a crisis, dethrone the widowed Empress and advance the Cæsar and her son. In common with others he dreaded a woman's rule; nor did he love Eudocia, but guessed that John Ducas would prove a more compliant monarch and friendlier to his purposes than she. He hated sex, and set its potency in affairs to the credit of women rather than men. His theological bias set ferociously against all things feminine, and he had as yet known no high interests served by human love. The lust of the flesh was a hunger unfelt by him; under the lust of the spirit he went in chains.

The Cæsar and Psellus saluted Xiphilin with reverence. Then the historian paid compliment to his recent diplomacy.

"You have done well, Patriarch, and won her Majesty," he said.

"Not unto me the praise," replied Xiphilin, from force of habit. "Rather thank Heaven, that opened

Eudocia's heart to wisdom and convinced her we spoke truth. You must leap into the saddle instantly, Psellus."

"Her wish?"

"Her need—the Nation's need. Nicephorus cannot fall unless you rise. The Senate knows there is none else."

Michael Psellus saw the ambition of long, patient years gratified at last. He stood the Prime Minister of the East. For a moment he closed his eyes and breathed gently. His fingers still seemed reaching for a pen.

The Cæsar's voice recalled him to himself.

"There is more work yet. The Governor of Thrace answers his indictment—high treason to the Throne."

"Romanus Diogenes is doomed," declared Xiphilin. "The witnesses are come along with him: Zonaras and Philagrius—very honest, high-born men, who heard with their own ears the thing he said. My brother, Bardas, their present host, is much cast down, for he and Romanus were old camp-fellows, and Bardas held him in great esteem."

"Much I mourn this catastrophe also," answered

John Ducas; "for Romanus was a very great general."

"Also a very great fool," added Michael Psellus. "As many generals are."

"Right must be done; flagrant treason must be paid," asserted the Patriarch.

"And yet they whisper that the mercenaries will make grave trouble if ill betide him," ventured the Caesar.

As he spoke there entered a small company, and two Thracians, about to testify against the Governor of Thrace, together with Xiphilin's brother, Bardas, a centurion and a small band of Varangian guards came into the Daphne, ascending thereto from the groves beneath.

Bardas, the Protostrator, was a showy man of thirty-five—taller, more shapely and younger by ten years than the Patriarch. As keeper of the royal hawks and hounds he filled a position of no political importance, yet not a sinecure. He prided himself upon his skill in all matters pertaining to sport; the people adored him, for he ordered their shows in the hippodrome; he was of a conventionally handsome exterior, with a beard, which he combed and curled after the Assyrian manner, and

rolling eyes the women loved. He had not shone in war, and revealed no ambition again to desert the palace for the field. He feared his brother, and Xiphilin despised him.

Philagrius and Zonaras were elderly men, who came not willingly to Court. Weary from their journey, they saluted the Cæsar as he greeted them.

“Welcome from Thrace, good friends,” said John Ducas; “would that you were at Constantinople on a happier errand.”

“And so would we,” replied Zonaras. “We share the Cæsar’s lament and are here unwillingly.”

He spoke without awe and revealed indifference to the splendid figures about him.

“Romanus was dear to us,” explained the other.

“And ever shall be,” added Zonaras. Then Philagrius, the suaver man, proceeded:

“We sat at meat with him—his guests. We drank his wine, were merry and set no value upon the fatal words. But secret enemies, hungry to stab, shared the board. They told the thing again in its nakedness, unsoftened by the circumstances, and out of its setting.”

Bardas strutted and fumed while the Thracians spoke. He talked in a big voice and showed indignation. But he was a theatrical soul and acted

from habit even when in earnest. He knew the grace of his deportment, his charm of movement, and though these were in a measure lost under the bejewelled robes of Court he now wore, yet the man presented a figure sufficiently imposing as he glittered and strutted like a peacock.

“Trash! Trash and insensate folly!” he cried. “It must not be. It shall not be. Romanus is the heart, the soul of our Northern armies. Crush this trumped-up knavery in the bud and save him, brother.”

He turned to Xiphilin, but the Patriarch refused the light of his countenance.

“Windy words are vain,” he answered.

“And what were the words of Romanus but a gust of wind in his cups? A jest for friends; no more.”

“Not so the informers say,” replied Cæsar. “Romanus Diogenes is as temperate as he’s chaste. He spoke in earnest.”

“Then he will die in earnest,” added Michael Psellus; and Bardas exploded with wrath.

“Oh blessed God! Are these the days for slaying generals? We need more—a thousand more—than we can find. This man’s a mighty captain. They who fought beside him, as I have, know it;

and better still those who have fought against him."

"Heroism cannot prevail against high treason," declared John Ducas. Then he directed the centurion to fetch his prisoner.

The soldier ventured a word before he departed.

He was a fair, burly man with a tanned, red face and close-cut sandy hair—a mercenary who had drifted into the employment of the Eastern Empire with thousands of his countrymen.

He spoke with an accent that amused his listeners; but he spoke to the point.

"Let a plain man address your honours—one who knows the general and his might—one who has seen the Seljouk Turks fly before his shadow. Touch but a hair of his mane in Constantinople and the Varangians——"

Psellus cut him short.

"Peace, barbarian! Who is this that threatens? Fetch your prisoner."

The Varangian looked at him without fear.

"'Peace,' you say, great lord? These Patricians, who came along with us, will tell you what peace you are like to enjoy in Thrace, dare you destroy that man!"

He gave a word of command and disappeared

with his detachment. They were big, fair, broad-shouldered Northerners like himself. Bardas followed them, still gesticulating.

“You silence him,” said Zonaras; “but he tells the truth. Sound statesmanship had let this matter pass, or, for a lesson, deprived the informers of their long ears.”

“Do you teach us our business, Zonaras?” asked the historian.

“It seems we can,” replied the Thracian stoutly.

“Indeed it was most innocent treason,” continued Philagrius. “For consider; where, after all, is the crime when a man wishes he might wed a widow?”

“Take heed, Philagrius,” replied the Patriarch sternly. “A crime, and worse than a crime, that man commits who would seek a widow sworn to widowhood. Are sacred oaths held so lightly in Thrace?”

“You’ll rob the State of her first soldier and the armies of the leader they best love,” answered Philagrius, while Michael Psellus exhibited impatience.

“What a stir and splutter we make about this Governor,” he said. “What has he done above his duty? One would think a thousand victories stood to his credit. Where are his statues? Where are his triumphs?”

"It is for him to ask a selfish and ungrateful State that question," replied Zonaras. "He earned them, and not for gratitude but justice he should have had them."

But a greater than Romanus now appeared upon the stage where he was called to answer for his acts.

§ 3

Nicephorus, the fallen Prime Minister, entered with no larger retinue than a couple of old men and a clerk; while the two Thracians went their way to the balcony and thence descended to the gardens beneath.

The statesman who had controlled the destinies of the realm under his late master, Constantine, presented a contrast to those that now saluted him. He wore the toga and pursued in spirit the ancient ideals. He was tall, still upright, with thick, short, snowy hair and a large, clean-shaven face. His eyes were grey, his features fine, but heavily modelled, his forehead little lined. His chin was still round and firm, and his mouth cast in a genial expression, which echoed the twinkle of his eyes. He might have been a great comedian, save for the brow, broader than any comedian ever carried.

There was something akin to a mask in this large, fleshy face, and indeed, much that belonged to Nicephorus no man had fathomed. A naked arm, that protruded from his white robe, was still firm of muscle and finely moulded to the thick wrist and square hand. He belied the Cæsar's criticism, for Nicephorus betrayed will in his face and resolution in his walk. He could act as well as scheme; he could read men, in virtue of wide sympathies, and control them by the art to win. He knew that nothing was to be had for nothing, and carried that experience into politics. The turns and twists of fortune had left him as they found him—indifferent to personal prosperity or private gain. He had striven with a single heart for the Empire; and now he was not discontent to take his departure, yet mourned the manner of it. A master of statecraft and a man of larger intellect than those who now held the whip hand of him, Nicephorus possessed in addition two qualities alike rare in his day. His outlook upon life was clarified by a sense of humour and purified by “aidos,”—that ethical virtue which may be translated “ruth.” These endowments of laughter and pity were radical to the man, and had sustained his spirit and often puzzled his peers. He was a childless widower, and certain noble

women understood him better and more rightly valued in him qualities that men accounted levity and weakness. He knew the peril in which he now stood, yet felt not deeply concerned to extricate himself, nor guessed what singular chance might give him the opportunity to do so.

“Still the Roman manner!” sneered Michael Psellus under his breath to Xiphilin; then the Cæsar spoke, in a voice that embraced both melancholy and respect.

“Nicephorus, hail!” said he.

“Nicephorus, hail!” echoed the Patriarch with a different inflection.

“All hail, Nicephorus!” added Michael Psellus.

The white-headed man acknowledged their greetings.

“The living salute the dying,” he said. “That is to change our gladiators’ order.”

Then he challenged directly, yet with a sort of humorous irony that lightened his speech.

“Tell me, Cæsar, since when hath our most lordly king of beasts chosen to hunt with the lesser creatures? Could you not pull down this ancient quarry all alone?”

John Ducas flushed and puffed his cheeks.

"The State welcomes every helping hand, so that it be guided by a loyal heart," he answered.

"Why, that is wisely said," admitted the other; then Xiphilin took up the theme.

"And when such hearts chime in harmony——"
But Nicephorus interrupted.

"Wisdom in numbers, Patriarch! Well, that too, is an opinion. This, our modern world, is full of opinions. They take the place of ideas."

Michael Psellus went deeper and the fallen counsellor understood his meaning. They had measured swords for ten years.

"Our life itself is only an opinion," summed the historian. "If we live, then the world must know that, in our opinion, life is yet worth while."

"True; and if we cease to live, we tell the world our life's grown worthless," replied Nicephorus.

"Only when our own will makes an end of it," said the matter-of-fact Caesar; whereupon Xiphilin, quick to resent doubtful doctrines, reminded them that life came from God.

Nicephorus answered in pagan terms.

"We're bid, no doubt, to lift the load at the Almighty's time; but by His grace it is our privilege to drop it when we choose," he answered.

"Can you say that and claim to be a Christian?" asked the priest. "You have yet much to learn."

Psellus brought the matter back to a personal channel.

"Are you, for one, not weary of your life, Nicephorus?" he asked bluntly, and the other answered that he was not.

"Of old I may have been; but never less than to-day, Michael," he replied. "Life, when you have learned to live, can be a very good and wholesome thing, my friend. The problem's there. Our Xiphilin teaches us how to die; but flouts the ancient wisdom, that reminded us the beasts and fishes and fowls of the air can die as well as we. No, no, you must not suppose your difficulties will be banished that way. I'll not willingly quit the cabin till the chimney smokes, for the place is still habitable; the sun is warm upon my head; the air is sweet in my lungs; sleeping I am still glad to know I shall waken again."

Ducas regarded him with curious interest, for he had suspected Nicephorus might choose to make his own exit after the curtain fell on his affairs.

"You say that, standing where you stand?" he asked.

"He does not stand, he has fallen, Cæsar."

Psellus spoke and Nicephorus turned to him.

His voice had lost its banter, but no shadow of temper tinctured it. He spoke earnestly.

“Aye, Michael—fallen, but not shattered. This brings neither terror nor heart-break in its train for me—nor yet much astonishment, for I guessed from the first that what I have done would reach your ears and the Senate’s. But no stroke of fortune from without can hurt our holy of holies. There Xiphilin is with me. One only death a man needs to fear: the death he breeds himself when his hope fails him. Men hawk at power as falcons at the heron; and those who win it and do not abuse it are still the salt of the earth. Remember that, my learned history-writer, if you, in your turn, would offer clean material for future pens.”

“You preach better than you have practised,” answered Psellus, “you, who would patch and patch again with peace for ever—a coward peace, won at a coward price.”

“We must be just,” answered Nicephorus impersonally, as though he defended another than himself. “When enemies are battering at the gate, Michael, be advised and parley with them—if you lack power to hold the gate.”

“But was it well to kiss the infidel’s robe, when Christ’s good sword should find his heart?”

Nicephorus smiled again gently.

“The sword of Christ needs sharpening, Patriarch,” he answered. “We lack the means, though not the wit to find the means, to make it flash again. Our cocks shall yet crow a glad new morning and the Empire waken to sleep no more.”

“Yea, wake to live,” added the Cæsar; “for now it fears to wake, lest it should wake to die.”

Psellus became personal again.

“You are lost,” he said; “because you thought to bar the sun from rising, idly wasted our priceless opportunities and dallied with base intrigue, while strangers rent the Empire.”

Nicephorus shook his head.

“Mend the indictment before Eudocia hears it,” he answered. “‘Strangers?’ No. Ourselves, not strangers, are crumbling the Empire like rotten bread. These things have happened from within. You stand, as you aver, for the patricians; but cast back your thoughts, for he who writes history should think historically, too. Who stole the crown from Stratioticus, and left in the lurch our old Sixth Michael for the first Isaac?”

“That was to the good,” interposed Xiphilin. “Patrician power had nearly perished, deserted by a State that our God struck blind for passing sins.

But now again patrician strength is waxing, to the country's salvation: the Church stands for it."

"Did Christ?" asked Nicephorus.

"He willed that Cæsar received what rightly was Cæsar's to administer and control. Why do you still covertly gibe at the Fountain of Justice, old man—at the Service you yourself may soon be called to enter?"

Nicephorus bowed his head.

"Hath Eudocia already willed the cord and cowl for me?" he asked.

"Her imperial mercy inclines that way," answered John Ducas.

"Only if you desire it, Nicephorus. You can 'leave the cabin if the chimney smokes,'" murmured Psellus.

The elder smiled.

"A hit, Michael," he said, and then the Cæsar challenged him.

"Hear me—you who were my brother's best-loved servant. Since Fate decrees that the burden must fall into other hands from this day, Nicephorus, I bid you think upon your legacy for those called to the dangers and difficulties ahead. The future's dark—we know it. The Turks are

triumphing from Persia to the Hellespont; Danube pours out her hordes, like gnats from a marsh at evening, and new, strange, savage foes are on the frontiers, sprung out of the womb of darkness."

The fallen minister turned and sat himself in one of the chairs set for the approaching trial. For a moment he was silent, with his eyes staring into the past; then he made answer.

"Willingly I speak, and pray that Cæsar will hear as willingly. Let us ascend for a bird's-eye view.

"We bless the Isaurian princes, who laid the deep foundations of our realm in a manner worthy of all admiration; and we ban the Basilian dynasty, that went far to undermine the good work of the past. Now we are called to restore again those old foundations as best we may, or down the fabric quickly comes. We are confronted with a mountain of toilsome, patient, unseen work—laborious, ungrateful, hidden from the popular eye and understanding. Such achievement wins no breath of praise from this generation. There's none, my friends, who will proclaim your pains—it is no work for demagogues; and the Factions—'Blue' and 'Green' alike—will only spit upon your self-sacrifice. You must go to work like moles in the dark, be content if

historians unborn applaud your honourable industry and trust your fame to them.

“You will wiseliest begin with the Court itself. To-day we see courtiers struggling for the statesman’s seat—a sign of utmost danger—and eunuchs are squeaking in every lofty place, till the few men remaining stare up in wonder, to know how the creatures climbed there.”

Psellus interrupted.

“For that cause—to purify a fœtid Court—we seek the restoration of our order, Nicephorus. We do not need direction upon the road we already go. Patricians long have stood aloof, to escape the stench, but now our duty to the Empire and the Throne demands that we remind the world of our existence. You, too, were born noble; but it was you—not we—who courted the popular voice.”

“I seek the people?” asked the old man, surprised into bland wonder. “That’s news indeed!”

“All are tempted to do so,” declared John Ducas; “and thus the internal danger has grown out of self-seeking among the great. We combine to spoil the multitude and make them supine, feeble as a child bored with too many toys. We win their voice by thinking of the hippodrome, not where the lonely outposts of our kingdom grow weak and

neglected for lack of means. Nicephorus is right: pageants buy our popularity, and the people only demand that money should be spent to make their pleasure, for pleasure is more to them than safety. Shows they understand; but stint that we may build another aqueduct, or break far distant roads for the feet of the legions—what care they then?"

"And what does Eudocia care?" struck in Psellus boldly. "Not the least charge against you, Nicephorus, is this: that you have always been content to please the woman rather than instruct the Queen in queenship."

"That should have been your work, my persistent gad-fly," answered Nicephorus.

"Yet Psellus is in the right," urged Xiphilin, well content to broach the vital subject lying behind the fall of the minister. "The life of the Empress must lie bound up only in the State—for that alone to have her being and draw her daily breath."

"You lack human nature, my good Patriarch," answered Nicephorus, again smiling. "There have, I grant, been kings that were something more than men; but no empress was ever more than a woman. They're made of precious earth; but clay is clay, though moulded into royalty. The hopes and fears and ambitions and dreams—the plagues and pangs

and petty griefs that prick the least and greatest—these do not fly away because the creature wears a crown."

"The Empress," answered Xiphilin, "should forget that she is a woman, even as rare emperors have learned to forget that they were men. I speak in a spiritual sense."

"Forget that she's a woman?" When Eros and Athene forget it—not sooner."

"Dead, heathen gods should be on no tongue that addresses me, Nicephorus."

"Why not, Patriarch? Why scorn the gods our great forefathers knelt to? They at least blazed out a way to victory. But now, at sound of foe, we fly to Church and dip our heads deep under her holy walls, like ostriches in the sand. The world that you and I call 'heathen' laughs at us."

Xiphilin's eyes flashed in anger.

"For that you'd die at Rome," he said.

"We are surveying the present situation; therefore, let us think on all you stand for, Patriarch," continued Nicephorus. "The spirit of Religion, I submit, lacks something, too. Correct me if I err, when I assert that it has sunk to show and ceremonial, unconsciously influenced by those for whom it caters, as we all are. We nurse the martyr's

bones in our bosoms until they turn our hearts cold ; and our prayers are purgative, not tonic ; they emasculate, but do not fortify. Our festivals increase to folly and our time is spent in worshipping dead saints, rather than serving a live monarch."

"There's truth in that," declared the Cæsar ; "but our pretentious religion has vast compensations. Remember the suppliants who daily fly to our Christian arms ; consider how Armenia, Scythia, send to us their mightiest. Nor do they come empty-handed for support. The fugitive wealth of Alexandria, Tyre, Sidon, fills the Golden Horn, knowing our Christian banners spell security as well as sanctity."

"Thus the Church is doing what the State should do—and cannot," summed the Patriarch.

"Has Mother Church then gone into trade?" asked Nicephorus mildly. "Do you, unashamed, seek the sovereign power and embrace the sovereign's commerce?"

"Only that ruler will be served whose power is sovereign," answered Psellus, and Nicephorus, alive to the implication, rose from his chair and turned upon him.

"In this land," he said, "the measure of our reigning prince has ever been the measure of public

happiness. Our freedom is a reflection of the monarch's freedom, who is now a woman and a rare one. Were she free, the nation would know a large measure of content; but free she is not, and you priests and counsellors, who would cringe to a man, pardon his guilt and applaud his whims, conspire to bully this lonely woman in the purple. You little know her virtues, or her promise. She is endowed with all that best becomes a mortal throne—all save a bodyguard of faithful spirits to guide her steps."

"Her soul is royal if ever soul was royal," answered John Ducas; "but her mind inclines to paths of peace and her heart knows its own emptiness. The throne can never satisfy her inward genius."

"Enough! Enough!" answered Nicephorus. "I know all that you would say—all that Church and State have taught you, Cæsar. So her light is to be quenched for ever, and our Eastern throne loses a ruler, who, had she been served as she deserved, had written many a nobler page in time than will John Ducas. Why look astonished, friends? Am I not right? Noble Cæsar here will soon doff his green buskins for the red, wear a shut diadem for his open crown, and dip an imperial pen in purple ink."

"Who heeds a meaner colour?" asked Psellus.

“And you,” continued Nicephorus, “you take my empty place, Michael. Does Cæsar grasp the sceptre willingly? Has he scanned the doubtful countenance of duty and remembered the lesser passions prone to masquerade in that name? Has he even condescended to think upon the peril? Still she’s a well loved queen. Is it highest wisdom to reckon thus without her?”

He was not answered, for the blare of loud trumpets from within the palace ended their conversation and the Court approached.

§ 4

The silver doors behind the throne were opened, and at the same moment there entered from the gardens, Bardas with Zonaras, Philagrius, a full guard of the Varangian troops and Romanus Diogenes.

“The other villain!” said Nicephorus. “Hail, soldier!”

Romanus saluted the Cæsar, did reverence to Xiphilin and turned to the statesman. The Governor of Thrace was at that time in the fulness of his strength and fame. He possessed the sort of beauty Greece had worshipped and made immortal in the

Golden Age. Taller than he appeared, by reason of his exact proportions, he stood somewhat above six feet high. He was dark, with curly hair and a face masculine and stern, yet so perfect in every feature that power mated beauty and neither lessened the other. He lacked, however, the passionless serenity of the old ideal. He walked with the free stride of unhindered limbs that had seldom known the garments of state, and though he gazed upon the judgment seat without fear, he was anxious and sorely troubled. Tremendous disaster had fallen upon him, and the issue depended upon the slender thread of the royal will. He believed that death awaited him, and his highest hope was only that a kindly fate might permit him to choose death where he best desired to meet it.

“You, too, arraigned?” he asked. “Our Constantine for ever leaned upon your shoulder, Nicephorus.”

“He’s dead,” answered the old man; then two trumpeters entered the silver doors, stood one on either side, lifted their tubes and blew. To the clarion there came first minor officials bedizened in silk and gold, while senators and courtiers to the number of a hundred followed. Magnificent was the pomp, stupendous the wealth and decoration,

exhausting the opulence of precious metals, rare gems and primary colours displayed by that gathering; for no such aulic splendour as lighted the Throne of the East has been recorded in the history of mankind.

Many women followed the senators, and while great officers took the seats prepared for them, the women grouped upon the right hand of the throne. There, among others, stood Irene Ducas, aunt of the Empress; Theodora, her first favourite and tire-woman; Maria, descended from a vanished dynasty; Euphrosyne and Gregoria, young girls of the family of Nicephorus. Irene was a widow of a free tongue—grey-haired, peppery—who adored Eudocia with passionate fervour; Theodora—a child companion of Eudocia—had been translated from obscurity when Constantine took his young bride. She loved her royal playmate dearly, but with divided devotion now, for Theodora was betrothed to Bardas, and knew that the Empress did not approve the match.

A single herald followed the main assemblage and stood, like a pillar of burnished gold, between the silver doors. In a voice loud and sonorous he cried:

“Eudocia Augusta! Eudocia Augusta! Eudocia Augusta!”

Then he moved aside, the trumpets screamed again and unseen music thundered.

The Empress entered alone. Other queens had been almost hidden by the amazing robes and regalia of the monarch. They had peeped like dolls from these gorgeous habiliments and trembled beneath their weight. Not so the widow of Constantine. She was tall and strong, and supported her glittering, gem-encrusted garments as easily as she held the great orb and sceptre in either hand. Her face was rich in its complexion and her lovely neck supported the huge diadem without being bent by it. The erection towering above her brow imitated the fashion of the Persian kings. Its silken pyramid was covered with precious stones and blazed as though on fire. The crown was formed by a golden and jewelled circlet from which rose arches of gold to their intersection, where stood a globe and cross; while the cheek pieces fell in lappets heavy with great pearls.

But the woman was not hidden under her fine feathers. She owned no classic beauty, yet her dark eyes, straight eyebrows and large finely-

turned mouth were of that order that makes decoration vain and dwarfs physical perfection by the greater distinction of character. The power to feel and the brain to think alike appeared in her features—impassive now under the mask of state they wore. She was proud and moved proudly. She swept with leisured stateliness to her throne and spoke to Irene as she did so. The old woman loosened a bracelet on the left wrist of the Empress.

A troop of the household guard came after her in shining armour, and the silver doors were shut again. Adoration of the Monarch followed—an absolute and servile obeisance that sent the assembly grovelling upon the marble floors, so that the Court suddenly resembled a gigantic flower-bed flung under the radiance poured from the dome above. As the trumpets again sounded, every man from the greatest to the least sank prostrate, while the women fell upon their knees. Eudocia and the soldiers alone stood, and she looked without emotion over the recumbent and abject multitude. Then, as she sat upon her throne, Theodora ordered her robe, the trumpets brayed for the last time, the hidden music ceased and the people rose to their feet.

There followed a stir and movement, while a

cumbrous ritual was observed to the last small detail and a thousand petty trifles accomplished. During these moments the palace troops, in their burnished brass and steel, gazed with curiosity at the Varangians, toil-worn from their march, but taller by a span than themselves. Then they centred their admiration upon the famous figure of Romanus Diogenes.

All was fulfilled at last and a great silence followed. Thereupon the Cæsar walked out into the open place before the throne. To his right were grouped the Patriarch under his golden symbol, Michael Psellus and Nicephorus; upon the left stood the mercenaries and their centurion with Zonaras, Philagrius, and the Governor of Thrace. Bardas had taken the Protostrator's station.

“Welcome, my brother,” said Eudocia, in a voice of soprano note, mellow and clear.

“Hail, Majesty,” replied John Ducas. “Now, for our grief, two malefactors are come to know your will. And first be pleased to hear your minister, Nicephorus. Then must you try this Cappadocian, your Governor of Thrace, Romanus Diogenes, who in recent years hath done great service, but now falls under high treason proved against him.”

“Proved?” she asked. Her eyes had rested for a moment on the soldier, while a light of memory that none saw flashed for a moment in them and went out.

“The witnesses that heard him speak are present,” answered Cæsar.

Nicephorus spoke.

“Think, Majesty, and think again before from these great shoulders, you fling down the valiant head that crowns them,” he said in his gentle tones; while with lowered voice Eudocia answered.

“Alas, Nicephorus, your good word no longer betters the fame of any man.”

“Be it so; but remember that the armies from the North, now come to Constantinople with this general, hold him next to yourself and your son in their stormy bosoms.”

“It is the truth, Majesty,” spoke out resolute Zonaras in his harsh fashion. “Romanus is their God.”

The Empress gazed upon him and her dark eyebrows seemed to join for a moment.

“A man their God?” she asked. “Barbarians we knew they were—these great, tawny men; but are they turned heathen too? It is time you loosed your monks upon them, Patriarch.”

None replied and she spoke again.

“Nicephorus, stand you here. Let Michael Psellus speak.”

The white-robed minister and the historian walked out before the throne and John Ducas joined Xiphilin.

Psellus was no great orator, but the magnitude of his matter filled his mouth to-day; though his manner had ever been bookish and artificial.

“The charge we bring against your first minister is this, Majesty. That over-long he has ignored the Empire’s need and dark fortune. His policy is ever to delay action by evasive shift, and suck from every new problem a way to burk another. Each fresh disaster serves him as an excuse to ignore the last, and he thinks not synthetically but in pieces. He confounds himself, and his thoughts do not come together. There is no continuity of design, but a policy of expedients hatched from day to day and hour to hour. He clings to worn-out usage, and shrinks in fear from each new-born ill, because the old medicine will not serve and the new surgery is beyond his strength to apply. The only good before his fading eyes is present peace—peace at all cost of honour—peace at the price of death. But death should be the price of victory, and peace, before

victory comes, is one more nail driven into the coffin of the Empire. Leave the power longer with him, and soon, upon the horns of the Crescent tossed and gored, we must fall, as one a bull has caught; for he'll delay till Alp Arslan is thundering at the Golden Gate; and even now, so fatally hath he intrigued with our first enemy, that genius shall scarce avail us to salve this most deadly wound. 'Too late' will be our cry too soon, if this man holds longer his false and feeble way. And since the definite word must be spoken, we blame him now for treating privily among our foes and sending to Alp Arslan's self messengers to stave off the infidel under a secret treaty. Prove that, as we can, and it needs neither voice of mine, nor another's, to show that Nicephorus is all that I charge against him and deserves a fate as dark as any traitor ever won."

"Let the Patriarch speak," said Eudocia, who had listened to Psellus without revealing her thoughts.

Then Xiphilin approached the steps of the throne. His noble voice rang to the roof with perfect rhythm and modulation; yet for all the art of the priest and his measured oratory, enthusiasm he never inspired. His light was bright, his words

perfectly chosen at all times; but there lacked heat from them, since none who in secret sets self first, is gifted with the fire that wakens answering fire. Art cannot emulate the conviction that a selfless honesty inspires.

“Thus, Majesty, I declare,” began Xiphilin. “The Spirit of the Church is charity, and in the name of our Master, I would extenuate this awful charge from wickedness to human weakness. Let the past colour justice with the gentle ray of mercy, Eudocia Augusta. Nicephorus has moved far down the vale of years and his judgment totters. Within this hour he spoke jestingly of holy things and, even to me, could name the names of dead deities. Therefore I perceived that Almighty God had already thrust a finger into your minister’s subtle brain and broken up the gear. A great machine, that falls from its perfection, may make deadly havoc for those who would still trust it; but a mind outworn is not an engine we can mend again. The time has therefore come when Nicephorus should cease his activities, ere ills are done beyond our sounder wits to cure. He must depart, and the manner of his going lies in your decision. I speak not to palliate his crime, save in the spirit for which I stand; for treason such as his, unless my words

have weight, can only be paid with the supreme penalty of death."

Eudocia raised her hand that held the sceptre and Xiphilin ceased.

"Nicephorus," she said.

The Patriarch fell back and Nicephorus spoke, in no set phrase, but languidly, as though the matter were of little account.

"Your Empire, Majesty, is to-day a lion that hath slain a stag, but cannot hold his game against the other beasts that wait upon his hunting."

Eudocia accepted the challenge.

"Nay, our simile is worthier and has been praised by yourself ere now," she answered. "Our Empire is the link between the Eastern and the Western humanity—a jewel, that lies between the breasts of the great world, to hold the robe that clothes them."

"A Christian fortress rather," interposed the Patriarch. "Call it the barrier against Islam, lifted to cry halt to unfaith and raise the blessed Cross as high above the Crescent, as a steadfast star above the young moon."

"And more than that," declared Eudocia, bending forward. "We'll conquer first the huge body of all unfaith, then lead the infidel to the eternal fold."

“Meantime the star sinks and the young moon grows,” declared Nicephorus. “This, indeed, is no day for metaphors. Psellus has told you that I am prone to wait upon the event, but that is false. My purpose is ever to anticipate, because I know that God on high is mostly minded to help the strongest, and in His wisdom permits might the foremost voice in all human affairs. But while the lion’s strength is over-clouded, as now it is, he must call to him the serpent, that her tongue may serve to charm the enemy and arrest his hand until the lion has breathed again. Then shall you find that God helps the wisest also. We are sick, Majesty, and neither East nor West spares a physician for us, since neither cares how soon we perish.”

“Is not that treason?” asked Eudocia, but with interest rather than anger.

“Only biting truth,” answered the old man. “Not Rome would own us Romans; not Greece would claim us Greeks. We are become no more than the aliens of the East, who have renounced not alone the garb and quality, but the very speech and spirit whence we sprang.”

The man of letters spoke fiercely.

“Leave Latin to the Latins,” he said, “—— to the Latins and the Franks, for they are one. The

golden tongue of Greece is sweeter far and apter for our philosophy."

Nicephorus smiled and followed the issue.

"And where homes philosophy on the Bosphorus, Michael?" he inquired. "What tongue makes great a feeble thought? That giant's trumpet needs a man well-ribbed and stout of lungs to wake its deep-toned music. It was forged of primal thunder and the murmur of the wide-wayed sea; it was built to hold the voice of the myriad of men, the mourning and the triumph of hosts, the crash of war, the song of victory, the lamentation of the fallen. And it has uttered for all time the highest wisdom, the noblest poetry that this earth ever heard since chaos. And now that organ, fit for the song of the stars—what present purpose does it serve? Our poetasters string their tinkling epigrams upon it and their doubtful jests and city verses—as though one tamed an elephant to dance, for fools to laugh at. Greek became Plato's thought, not your history, Michael. It was that master's high ideal to dream philosopher and statesman in one. But birds of such feather have been rare, and much I doubt that you will ever spread a wing to fly with them."

Laughter followed, for culture still hid at Court. Eudocia smiled that this rare ray should thus have pierced the solemnity of the moment; and she smiled the more to see Michael Psellus scowl. But she forbade his answer and spoke what was in her mind.

In leisurely and desultory fashion were even the great Courts held, and even such a vital matter as the present might remain a long while retired before it was attained.

“Two Empires we would rule,” she said. “The Empire of the East, and that mightier, boundless realm which men have called the Empire of the Mind. For the one we wield our adamant, Roman justice; for the other, the everlasting wisdom of Greece.”

The Patriarch took a higher view.

“Both must lie vassal and slave to what’s above them both, Majesty,” said he. “The earth we rule and that uncertain land where uncertain reason reigns—these sink to nothingness and bend suppliant heads before the Lamp of Revelation burning above the Throne of the Soul’s Empire.”

Then a strange voice, fearless and deep, fell upon their ears. A man—Romanus Diogenes—addressed

Eudocia and every eye was bent upon him. He spoke as though the mountain winds he breathed still echoed within his great breast.

“Majesty,” he said, “I pray you listen to a tongue that must soon be stilled, and give heed to reality, if indeed reality be possible within the walls of a palace. I choke in this drizzle of words, and I tell you that until man is something more than man, his sword remains the only arbiter. We buy the sword—we, who should possess it as a part of our inheritance. The spirit that should enter every new-born child with its first breath is dead, and our countless gold pours out to the Sclav, the Bulgar and any men who still know how to do man’s work. Not love and honour guard the Empire, but minted metal and piled stones. Even the ships that protect our trade are not our own; our admirals live in palaces ashore and hirelings pull our triremes and fight the pirates. We wear silk rather than steel; we have felt neither Scythian arrow, nor Arabian spear. ‘A cold hand and a talkative voice’—that is the name we have achieved among the nations, and our religion—what does that teach us? To conquer? No. To prosper? No. To fortify our sublime inheritance and win

back glory by the way of discipline? No. What, then—to whine and yield? Yes.

“With gelded temper we trust to our knees, rather than our arms, hoping that the God of Battles will help men for ever on their marrowbones. But what deity draws his bow for such a cowardice of curs as run your streets? Mesopotamia and Cilicia swarm with Seljouk Turks; Syria they devour like locusts; in Cæsaria our fellow countrymen are slain as sheep. St. Basil’s sacred fane has been plundered of that wilderness of wealth a thousand votaries brought; and not the prayers of priests nor the tears of nuns could save a groat. For our honour, then, gird up your loins, and wake the nation from its dreams. Tell your people where they stand, and let them feel for once the raw air of truth upon their tender skins.”

Eudocia regarded Romanus intently during this impetuous speech. She followed every fiery word and flushed when he poured scorn upon her subjects.

“Yet war must be a losing war and bring us grief that well may be escaped,” said Nicephorus, and the soldier admitted it.

“To-day that’s true; but we may still keep the

field and threaten greater than we can perform," he answered. "Parthian tactics should be practised while, unseen, we lick our wounds and build our broken legions. I indict your past neglects, Constantinople. The armies are starved in Thrace and on the frontiers, far and near."

"Nay, nay, Romanus Diogenes. You're here for judgment, not to judge," protested the Cæsar. "Let us listen again to Nicephorus."

"I see the State like a dying camp-fire in a savage field," answered the old man. "A fire whose flames serve awhile to show the eyes ringed round of watchful, fatal things that only wait to spring. Nor shall the dawn scatter them, for they are not the foes that Diogenes Romanus would destroy; they lurk within our walls; they harbour here."

Some emotion marked this statement. Senatorial heads bent together; suspicion and distrust exchanged glances. Angry eyes were flashed upon the fallen statesman.

"See them stir!" he continued. "Like beetles when we lift the stone that hides their secret burrows. They, who would tear from the brow of Majesty the Eastern crown, are even those who fling themselves for her to walk upon."

An undertone of angry voices hummed through the multitude. Those that doubted, were tempted

to believe the old man; they who knew that Nicephorus spoke the truth, denied it noisily.

“This may be as you declare,” answered the Empress. “All thrones are built on trust, and we who sit upon them are called to trust—not always willingly. At least we trusted you. Oh, Nicephorus, in this hour that’s darkling over your dishonoured head, we ask you but one question, which sums all that men have testified against you. And we pray to God that you can say ‘no’ in answer to it. Were you in secret treaty with Alp Arslan before he withdrew his armies?”

“I was,” answered the statesman; “and for that reason he did withdraw.”

“You’re judged; you’re judged! cried Psellus, and others echoed him. But the eyes of Nicephorus were on Eudocia alone. He preserved his measured speech and imparted to it no note of entreaty or protest.

“Our mightiest foe had trodden these halls, our city conduits had run blood, Majesty, but for the statecraft that held him off with one hand and with the other incited his enemies to proceed against him in his absence. Diplomacy remains our only hope, while aggressive war is impossible.”

Eudocia shook her head.

“The Emperor Constantine loved you and trusted

you. Well that he did not live to learn this great betrayal," she answered. Then she addressed the Cæsar.

"Let him be taken to Marmora to await our pleasure," she said.

Nicephorus did obeisance; then he rose and gave himself to a guard of the household troops who now surrounded him.

"Farewell, Majesty. May Heaven's all watching eye maintain your throne, and you, and the son of Constantine. I shall leave this life as indifferently as I entered it, if that should be your royal purpose; and yet I mourn to think how the courts of Hades must shiver at my shadow, and the shade of the dead Emperor grow pale at news of the sword I leave hanging above your ever glorious head."

"Farewell," answered Eudocia with a deep sigh.

Nicephorus turned to John Ducas.

"Look to the Ruler," he said gently. "Seek strength from God, and set not your trust on His vicegerent here, or on our historian. They who would sap a throne may, like Samson, bring down the pillars upon themselves."

He moved away, and his great white head vanished among the plumed helmets of the soldiers.

In the silence there was a sob and the two girls, Gregoria and Euphrosyne, of the household of the fallen man, wept in each other's arms. Eudocia bent to them; while elsewhere Xiphilin, the Cæsar and Michael Psellus spoke aside together.

In a few moments the Empress lifted her voice again.

“The charges against Romanus Diogenes, our Governor of Thrace,” she said.

Thereupon Romanus stood out before the throne and Zonaras and Philagrius accompanied him. The Cæsar spoke.

“Here, Majesty, are Patricians, loyal Thracians,” he answered, naming the witnesses. “They have come to bear their testimony of the things they heard.”

The travellers did obeisance and Zonaras opened the matter.

“Upon compulsion, Majesty, we stand before you; for we, who were this man's guests, would rather suffer great ills than do him one.”

“Others, not ourselves, reported him,” explained Philagrius.

“And would you have concealed high treason?” asked Eudocia, regarding their care-worn countenances.

"In truth we would have forgotten his ill-considered speech."

"Why so?"

"For justice, Majesty," replied Philagrius. "Words as much depend upon the ear that hears as the tongue that utters; the spirit alone quickeneth, and there was no treason in the spirit of Romanus. Diogenes is one not used to weigh the intricate pattern of woven words; and this blunt wish has been transformed to treason on the tongue of his foes."

"What spake he?" she asked.

Philagrius turned to his companion, who proceeded:

"We had poured libations to his old master, the late Emperor Constantine—a pagan rite in truth, yet we held it meet to do honour to the dead. And then, Majesty, Romanus spoke of Eudocia Augusta and said, with soldierly forthrightness, that she was exceeding fair and sadly undefended, as every widowed empress must be. He, having seen you, swore that to do so meant everlasting loyalty and worship—pity, too, now that you reigned alone. 'Oh would to God, my friends,' said he, 'that I might wed the Empress of the East and for a marriage gift, her armies recreate invincible, all

conquering as of yore!" So, with foolish rhetoric, the general spoke within the circle of those he trusted."

"A double treason," commented Michael Psellus.

"And what more did he say?" asked Eudocia.

"No more," answered Zonaras. "We warned him instantly that such a speech was dangerous as a jest, and, if made in sincerity, the more dangerous still. Too late he saw that he had spoken treason, though only with his lips. Base jealousy alone has imputed disloyalty to him."

"He prayed us forget his folly," added Philagrius. "But who that is loved, as Romanus is loved, escapes an enemy? Secret foes have stabbed him, Majesty, I'll swear to that."

Eudocia spoke to the culprit.

"When did you see us, Romanus?" she asked.

"Once only, Majesty," he answered, "while the late Emperor lived. Affairs of a campaign summoned me to Court and I beheld you by my master's side."

She considered this and recollected the occasion.

"We wondered when first our eyes had fallen upon you," she replied. "Now we remember. Can you deny what has been said against you?"

"Not one word," answered Romanus calmly,

“nor would if I could. I am noble: no Cappadocian family exceeds my own in ancient dignities and honour, and many of the mightiest in Asia Minor are linked with me. So much for that, Majesty; and for the rest I worship and adore you. I would spend ten thousand lives for you, and in this dark hour I ask you, not to spare me, or pardon my crime, but, of your royal mercy, to let me choose my end. Suffer me to die before your foes. I have at least deserved to be torn by lions in the field, rather than eaten alive by city rats.”

“Impiously you spoke,” she said. Her face had flushed a little and her eyes were bent upon the Governor, indifferent to the many eyes upon her own.

“My words rang so,” he confessed. “But I did not perceive the awful force of them, Majesty, because my memory still saw you a moon beside the sun of the Emperor. Fool that I was and sluggish of imagination, I still mirrored you in my thoughts a lesser light reflected from Constantine’s sun. My muddy senses failed to remember you were the risen orb itself, reigning and burning in the blue of heaven—sole source of light for all your servants.”

“You pitied us,” she answered. “You dared.”

“Aye,” he said. “I dared that, when I looked

back and minded how I had seen you, so ineffable—a budding flower of infinite and holy beauty—thrown into the gardens of withered age and sun-dered from all youth. For youth cleaves to youth, Majesty; youth seeks its natural joy and hope and highest wisdom, too, from youth. Youth burns to youth, as flame leaps up to welcome brother flame, so only justifying itself. How shall the grey and age-worn ministers of dead Kings speak to the heiress of our present cares and future hopes? Why must young Time and all that he promises be chilled and manacled by men who suck their worm-eaten caution and sagacity from a dead past?

“I saw you encircled with heads all bald, or shaking—forgive a soldier. I saw a Court that reeked with monks and eunuchs, and my thought rebelled against such martyrdom; my blood boiled—boiled over, God forgive me—so that I cried to myself how glorious a fate to wed the Queen, then, like a hurricane, loose cathartic lightnings to scorch and cleanse, search out each foul nook and cranny and slay the seeds of vice and cowardice and treachery fostered within them, for crops of pestilence to come. I longed that a clean soldier, like a desert wind, should slay the noisome, slimy things I saw, stand at Eudocia’s side and do man’s

work for her! Even so I dreamed and, in a waking dream, spoke it again."

Eudocia raised her hand, to still a dozen furious voices that simultaneously shouted for death upon the speaker.

"He who would love us stands a branded traitor to Michael, son of Constantine," she replied to Romanus.

"Not so, Majesty," answered he. "The son of Constantine has nothing to fear from one his father used as the blessed dead used me. He gave me trust, advancement, honour, reward. If there be a rival on this earth for Prince Michael, I am that man's first enemy."

The Cæsar spoke while still Eudocia gazed with parted lips at Diogenes.

"Return we to your crime, Governor of Thrace. Of your lunatic words we have heard enough. The evil that you did was worse—far worse than any thought against a coming King. You linked your name in men's ears with that of your Empress, knowing her to be sworn to widowhood. Is death too mild reward for that?"

The Varangians moved uneasily and a low sound, like a distant wave, rose from among them. Their centurion silenced the murmur.

“Have you not heard—you that seem half a madman and half still a child—have you not heard that our imperial oath before the Almighty is taken to wed no more?”

Eudocia spoke and Romanus made prompt reply.

“If that were all, Majesty!”

Then he turned to the Patriarch, who had already torn the soldier to pieces with his eyes and was fretting to let fall his thunder.

“What wit of man can bind, wit of man can loose again,” he said scornfully. “Is Xiphilin not usurer of the Holy Ghost and tax-gatherer to the Trinity? Trust him to find a way had Eudocia the will!”

The priests and people looked to the blazing dome above them, and many honestly expected the bolt of an outraged deity. The Patriarch cried aloud and voiced them nearly all.

“Profane wretch, would you call Heaven’s fire upon your accursed and blasphemous head?” he asked, trembling with passion.

But Eudocia stilled him.

“Let Romanus Diogenes speak on,” she said.

“I dreamed the dream, Divine One, and men who dream such dreams must perish for them,” answered the general. “But dream not you—dream not that your oath cannot be absolved. Shall crafty

speeches, whispered in the ear of a dying king, bolt and bar the door of life against all that life has to give of what is best and most sacred for any woman?"

"We have indeed heard enough!" cried John Ducas. "I implore Majesty to silence him. Shall the demented wretch preach passion of earth to your widowed ears?"

"Do you not tremble, Romanus?" asked Eudocia.

"I know not how to tremble," he answered. "In death's shadow now I stand, but never have I feared that stroke and never could. Rightly I am accused of crime, for to love you as a woman was a crime; but to adore my Empress, to desire that I might rebuild your broken armies and breed within your subjects' hearts a sense of shame and awakening manhood—that was no crime. For now the Nation gasps and totters like a poisoned man. Foul marasmus creeps through all its fibres, and it has fallen from every great tradition. At the roar of battle we tremble; and in time of peace we still tremble, when the 'Greens' howl at the 'Blues' over their petty politics. We're only brave when we're drunk; and wine, not honour, makes us threaten valiant deeds sobriety shrinks from.

“Had I lived, I had striven to change that, as I have changed it in Thrace. But take heed, Majesty—you who are called henceforth to guide and guard this realm. Build up to their ancient strength your armies; and remember this, that stern self-denial and the Spartan road are not for soldiers alone. And, last, I pray for the young and blessed Eudocia Augusta that her youth and glory shall not wither in loneliness, for no woman’s heart can brook loneliness—not even hers.”

“Swords strike! Shut his accursed mouth for ever!” cried Michael Psellus.

“By all the Seven Synods destroy him!” urged the Patriarch approaching the throne.

The frantic men broke etiquette, and Eudocia frowned.

“Let there be silence,” she said. Then she turned to Diogenes, who awaited his guard and dismissal. Curiously she looked upon him and, with imperial indifference to the press around her, spoke:

“Come to us, Romanus. Approach us, even to this step. We would see if you can bear yourself as bravely as you speak.”

He obeyed, and slowly ascended the steps of the throne until he stood eye to eye with the monarch. For a few moments he looked steadfastly upon her

face and neither her gaze nor his own faltered under the ordeal. That singular trial lasted not long; then the soldier covered his eyes with his hand, as though a light hurt them; he knelt, kissed the hem of the imperial robe and rose to his feet again. Meanwhile the woman showed no trace of any emotion and only herself heard her heart's beating. She spoke, and a level tone for the moment being impossible, against the inward flutter, threw scorn into her voice.

“You, too, can feel fear, Romanus!”

He answered for her ear alone.

“That’s not its name. Had I not kissed your robe, I had kissed you!”

Then he returned to his soldiers.

Xiphilin, having marked the scene with horror, was inspired to a course his friends found perilous. But he bided his time while the Queen spoke very calmly.

“What tortures you have earned, Romanus Diogenes, we shall determine at another hour than this. To the State Prisons upon Marmora let him be taken.”

The Varangians, ill at ease, hesitated at their centurion’s order, while the man himself showed dismay. The royal guards revealed answering

anger against the mercenaries, and Romanus quelled his own men with a word.

“To Marmora, dogs!” he shouted, and, with Bardas, departed among the soldiery, followed by Zonaras, Philagrius and others.

§ 5

Heads wagged together; voices murmured; eyes rolled in fear at the sullen barbarians—a handful from a great army at present assembled in the city. Old men buzzed; younger ones showed indignation. Amidst the stir only Eudocia sat as still as a statue carved in ivory and gold, staring out at the blue sky beyond the balcony. She had overcome her discomposure and turned to the Cæsar as he spoke to her.

“This man must not be spared, royal sister,” said John Ducas in anxious tones. “Delay will mean disaffection throughout the foreign armies; and that might threaten unspeakable disaster.”

“Soldiers are but a swarm of bees; they fight for hive and queen till she is dead, and then forget her and choose another. Let them know instantly this Cappadocian is destroyed and they will grow calm.”

It was the historian who spoke.

“We are the soldiers’ queen bee,” answered Eudocia. “Angel of life are we, not death, to all our people. Why such clamour to slay? You bring before us an old, wise man, beloved by Constantine for good reason, and this Governor, dear to our foreign legions. Shall both die?”

“That Eudocia Augusta may live,” answered Michael Psellus.

“Nicephorus,” began the Cæsar, “though the Patriarch and Psellus differ——”

But Eudocia was roused. She had read the spirit moving in the hearts of these men and anticipated them.

“We had rather see them differ,” she replied sternly.

“This is to flout both Church and State together, Majesty,” declared Xiphilin.

“Be it so, then,” she answered. “They shall work apart, and work the better apart. Allay your heresies, heal your schisms, and strive for peace in your own household, Patriarch, and leave Michael Psellus, now our first minister, to make the peace in ours.”

“What is this you say?” asked the priest blankly.

“That while we reign,” she answered, “no Pope

shall keep our conscience. Leave spiritual domination to the West. We know the evil issues of it there. Our human heart is its own temple, and therein none shall ever minister but the still, small voice that speaks to us from God Himself."

She broke off, then proceeded upon another theme, desiring no response to what she had spoken.

"Too much—too much for a monarch's peace have we heard and suffered before these fearless tongues of fallen men. Death and disgrace blow down upon us from all the winds. Our provinces are lopped off, our power broken."

"The boughs may shed a branch here and there, Majesty; but what great tree can come through every blast unscathed?" asked the Cæsar. "Our trunk is sturdy and will sprout again."

"Still Eudocia reigns from Nice unto Belgrade," declared Michael Psellus. "Her sceptre sways all Thrace and Greece and Macedonia, Cyprus and Rhodes, the fifty blessed isles of the Ægean."

"What are these? A rag to cover our shame," she answered.

"Is Constantinople nothing?" asked John Ducas. "Mighty Byzantium glows, the first gem of the earth, the bulwark of Christian Europe against the

infidel — the wealthiest, most populous, rarest, holiest Queen of Cities this world hath known, or ever shall. Our palaces, our churches, our harbours, our marts exist forever impregnable behind our walls—those mountains built by the genius of the past to laugh at Time."

"Who laughs at Time but a fool, brother?" asked Eudocia. "Man is the rust and canker that Time uses to do his work quickest. The lightning is slow and the tempest idle to the destructive force of human hearts. What matter mountains if only mice lie behind them? Heard you not Romanus Diogenes—how he said that what wit of man can build, man can pull down? The world breeds men, even as a cheese breeds mites—to its own destruction. 'Men' we say. Where shall we seek for them? The Cappadocian was a man and told the truth to me."

"Majesty," answered Psellus. "Romanus spoke as one already dead and therefore careless of what his lips uttered."

"He is not dead," answered the Empress; and then Xiphilin, feeling that his hour had come, addressed her.

"I pray you, listen, Majesty, to those of your counsellors who hold tradition sacred. We are at

a moment in our affairs when the royal heart must beat for Empire only; we face a stupendous crisis of our destinies, when it must become you, as you yourself have told us your custom is, to call upon the Living God and follow where His Holy Finger points. Well, indeed, the Empire knows that you are wise and most devout—a fit Queen for the mother city of Christendom. Therefore I say, be swift to hear the still, small voice that whispers at the altar of your spirit. Without fear I urge upon you, in Heaven's name, that if it be demanded what you so nobly hold should as nobly be renounced—then follow the Sacred Hand, though it may lead beyond your throne to higher things."

The Court moved again, and new fear and anger flashed from many eyes. The Cæsar shared the fear. He whispered to Xiphilin.

"For God's love, choose your words! This is no time——"

But Psellus supported the Patriarch.

"He's right, John Ducas. A ripe moment. Say it sternly now, and let her think upon the drift. It must come swiftly, and why not to-day?"

Eudocia, who had echoed none of the strong feeling that now surged around her, and flamed on the faces of her women, asked Xiphilin a question. She

understood him well enough, but pretended as yet not to do so.

“What more shall we renounce than is renounced already by our oath, Patriarch?”

“Look in your own heart, Empress, and seek there the wisdom and the celestial way that leads to the only answer,” he replied.

“Already!” she said, smiling. “Now we perceive—still dimly, but with a waxing light—what Nicephorus was thinking.”

“I pray you hear me,” begged the high priest.

“We shall hear. But do not our people love us still, with living and human love, or are you perchance the echo of sounds that have not yet struck our ears?”

“Of human love I pray you not to speak, Majesty. We’ve heard enough of that from the gross, doomed soldier,” answered Xiphilin. “Love of State, love of principle, if need be love of sacrifice, alone remain to her who took your sacred oaths.”

“The murderer’s out!” she said; and a sudden hiss and deep growl ran through the blazing figures around her. Irene spoke loud and shrill, while her aged countenance was wrinkled with passion, and she glared at the arch-priest.

“More traitors come to Court than are condemned by it!” she cried.

Michael Psellus lifted his voice and struck home without fear.

“An emperor the Empire demands to-day as never yet in its history,” he declared, “and they are traitors to the dynasty—they are traitors to the throne of the East—who dare deny it.”

Eudocia restrained her threatening courtiers and called for peace. Then she turned to the last speaker.

“And what are we, Michael Psellus?” she asked.

“A woman, Majesty,” he said. “And your revered sex, by its nature, cannot reign alone.”

She smiled again.

“We must not wed, and may not reign, it seems,” she answered, as though reflecting rather than making a reply. “Not home or sovereignty, not love or power, shall be permitted us.”

Then she frowned, the colour deepened on her face, and she fixed her eyes upon Michael Psellus.

“Your memory is weak for one who would write history,” she said. “We pray you cast it back a little to royal women, they the people loved, who

have written their reigns in letters of gold. Do you account us another Martina, to be hurled down by the nation's righteous rage and hate?"

"The people indeed would worship you, if they dared, my sister," declared John Ducas; "but the mob is full of moods and, like the Inland Sea, they smile to-day and sink a ship to-morrow."

"Nevertheless we would trust them sooner than some voices that we have just heard; their welcoming shout is sweeter music to us than any speech of counsellors—sweeter and dearer to our hearts. Because we know the voice of the multitude is the voice of our God."

"Madness, Majesty! Believe no such folly, but seek your God in Heaven," said Xiphilin.

"He chose us out of the myriads of women to fill this throne," she answered. "That at least admits no question; and shall we desert it for some cold, cowardly nook in that uplifted tomb of living dead men call a nunnery?"

Again a sibilant tremor passed through the ranks of the women.

"Your thought is unripe and harsh, Eudocia Augusta," replied Xiphilin very earnestly. "The cloister, not the throne, promises an everlasting fame that seldom yet has crowned a king. Is it not better to be the haloed saint of heaven, with life

consecrated to holiness, than still a royal doll, having no purpose nobler than the people's futile will?"

Cries of indignation gathered, and he turned upon the Court and lifted his voice, clarion clear, above the rest.

"Think not I dread your tongues, ye godless sycophants! Be warned, for he who would dare flout me, questions the Name of Him for Whom I speak."

He turned again to the impassive Queen.

"Oh, save your soul alive by your own august will, Majesty. Fly this vain and hollow pageant; quit this empty life of glittering worthlessness, to seek God and reality by devout and close communion with eternal truth! There only your high destiny beckons—the life of service, worship, humility—all higher than a throne. Trample beneath your feet the asp and basilisk; slay pride; conquer lust—"

Something like a scream broke from the elder women who listened, and men also displayed furious indignation. Irene voiced a hundred. Forgetting the place and time, she leapt down, as though she would tear the Patriarch's eyes with her withered fingers, and stood panting against him.

"Thou wretch!" she cried, "to sully the driven

snow of the imperial heart with thine impurities! Out upon thee, traitor to the Throne."

Xiphilin fell back before a roar of hearty temper, and the Cæsar, who was trembling, spoke to him.

"You've gone too far," he said.

"Fear not," answered the Patriarch. "I saw her eyes shine upon her accursed general. She understands that I have spoken no needless word."

Cæsar mounted to the steps of the throne, where silent, and without visible anger, the Empress sat regarding Xiphilin. Neither orb nor sceptre quivered in her steady hands.

Psellus also warned the high priest.

"You will fall," he said. "This may destroy us both. The army is still with her. We have gone too fast."

"We are unconquerable," answered Xiphilin, "while we remain of one mind and in the right."

Then the situation cleared and the storm passed at the Cæsar's voice.

"Audience is ended," he announced, and the heralds echoed him. A great movement swayed the people, and a sound like a falling wave escaped from the mass of them. Under it ran fury still. Only the woman on her throne sat motionless and silent, gazing at the Patriarch.

His attendants approached him, and beneath the acolyte's golden cross, he made obeisance and uttered a last word.

"Not in my own name, but for the King of Kings I have spoken, Majesty."

She did not answer, and her eyes followed him until he had disappeared.

The Court obeyed its rites; the trumpets again sounded; the silver doors were opened, and the Senators marched through them, followed by their retinues. The throng thinned gradually to music, while Irene and Theodora disrobed the Empress and relieved her of robe, diadem and many heavy ornaments. The marks of royalty were borne away, and with her gauds Eudocia seemed to fling down the part they dressed, and grow younger and more human. She was very silent, but smiled at Theodora, who, with a silken kerchief, cooled her hot forehead.

The Cæsar spoke.

"We leave you, but will sup with you, sister," he said. Then he followed the company into the palace with Michael Psellus.

Soon the doors were shut again, and only the guard remained, while Eudocia, descending, walked with the women to the balcony. There she

rested while two little negresses fanned her, and small page boys waited with basins of fruit and sweetmeats, and crystal flagons of white wine. The Empress loved the ministry of children, and delighted to see young things about her.

§ 6

The Monarch discarded sovereignty with its emblems, but active care sat upon her forehead and clashed with much that moved in her brain. Light flashed fitfully through the cloudy weather of Eudocia's mind, and none guessed all that was stirring there. Irene came close and took her hand. To Theodora, the golden-headed, a child brought a frame, whereon she worked in silk; Maria—a dark woman—sat by the balustrade with her eyes upon the sea; while the maidens Euphrosyne and Gregoria, squatted together on the marble floor, whispered of Nicephorus, and played at knuckle-bones.

Irene spoke, and her voice still panted with past anger.

“If eyes could kill, then you'd have slain the base thing. I shall not live again till Xiphilin has paid the price for this.”

“My ears drank poison. Yet, though I have long understood what was growing, it finds me unprepared. I am a true Byzantine—slow to action.”

“An avenging angel you should be,” said the ancient.

“Why do Churchmen think so evil of women?” asked Theodora.

“Because they misread the Faith, torture their Creed, forget Christ, and flout at Nature,” answered Irene. “They hate us all because they may not love us. Whereon Nature takes her revenge, and makes the sweet and fair look foul and evil in their eyes. You kept your temper with him, Eudocia! I could not.”

“My temper will soon be all that I have left to keep,” answered the Empress.

“Would to Highest God that you might love!” murmured Theodora. “I, that know love, marvel how any woman endures her life without it. Love is the only rainbow in the clouds—the clouds that mostly make our lives.”

“And passion the crooked lightning in those clouds. Be sure that both are fleeting, Theodora,” warned the dark girl with her eyes on the sea.

“Leave that stuff to Xiphilin, Maria,” replied the betrothed of Bardas. “Wait till you know better.”

"True love is not fleeting," declared Eudocia. "Though I have never felt it, my heart reverences true love beyond all true things: it is the very height of truth."

"Grant now, Theodora, that to Bardas, the Cappadocian was an oak to a reed," cried Gregoria. "I never saw such another. May a Romanus love me some day!"

"Seek Bardas," said the Empress. "I have a command. Go you, Theodora: you'll best know where to find him."

The bright-haired girl rose happily.

"It is his hour with the hawks, if he be not still with Diogenes," she answered, and descended into the garden.

"How the lady loves!" sighed Maria.

"I would she loved a better man," answered her mistress. "Theodora is a thousand times too brave and beautiful for our Protostrator."

"They do adore each other—even their hands can't keep from clinging," said Euphrosyne. "They creep out to each other in secret, like little birds. I've often watched them."

"Yet time runs seldom on the side of passion," mused Maria.

"A poor thing is our Bardas," declared Irene

frankly. "Shallow and vain, and a coward as I think under his booming voice. I marvel that the Patriarch should have a fool for a brother."

"Surely it is no misfortune to be a fool, for fools at least are happy," answered Eudocia. "Bardas is the only happy man I know."

"What shall you do?" asked the old woman.

"As yet I cannot think; but something resolute and swift. I trust the people, Irene, for all they say against them."

"And never sovereign safelier trusted. Let your cry reach them, and the factions will rise—the 'Greens' and the 'Blues' alike—and the army also, in such a storm that these ugly things must soon be swept to perdition. Nicephorus warned you. Scarcely was his back turned when these wretches began their disloyal work."

A young voice rang up from the garden.

"Is my mother there, Maria?"

"Yes, gracious Prince," she answered, and a moment later, Michael Ducas, followed by his guardian, ran up the steps.

Meantime Irene had spoken to Gregoria.

"Bid the new singer come—the girl from Cyprus. Majesty is out of heart—she may amuse her for a moment."

Gregoria crossed the main hall and disappeared, while Michael ran to Eudocia's couch.

"I'm thirsty," he said, and took fruit.

"And what have you been doing?" asked his mother.

He held up a great yellow plum to her.

"Kiss it—to make it sweeter inside," he demanded.

"What a courtier!" laughed Euphrosyne.

"Saurus has turned into a hateful crow," declared Michael, "and he shall be mine no more."

"Our Lizard turned into a crow?" asked Irene.

"Crunk—crunk! He croaks, and—and—everything's so sad," replied the child. He gave a little sob and bit fiercely into his plum to hide the sound.

"Why, you've been crying, Michael!" said the Empress.

"I have not!" he answered, with his mouth full. "It wasn't crying; but my eyes blinked without leave—Nicephorus—I love him so; and now you've sent him to be turned into a monk."

"Only outside—a cowl doesn't make a monk," grunted Saurus. He sat on a cushion beside the royal couch.

"Or diadem an Empress," said Eudocia. "Would you like to see me take the veil, Irene?"

"I'd tear it off with these gouty claws," she answered.

"The Patriarch would rather see me saint than queen, Saurus," continued Eudocia. She appeared to be uttering idle words, while her real thoughts moved out of sight. She was cast down and sighed sometimes.

"Of course he would," answered the little man. "Saints are easier to manage. Saints, in this land, are many, queens are few."

"And Xiphilin's a knave—an insolent, godless knave," snapped out Irene. "Strike before you're struck; cast him down and choose another priest—a man who knows his place—not a greedy patrician masquerading as a humble servant of the Lord. A bandit in a cope, a mitred thief—a traitor to his Empress. If there had been a man at Court he should have been slain to-day."

"You are a heroine, Madam," declared Saurus gravely. "Yours the courage to say what all think, yet fear for their lives to whisper."

"The Patriarch would destroy all womenkind at once through me," admitted Eudocia.

"Then, for all womenkind, destroy him," urged Irene. "Is it not vile that men whom we have borne, and given their flesh and blood and chance

of eternity, should thus revile the sacred sex of their mothers?"

"Too late to rage," replied the Lizard. "She's hung up her sword to rust by Marmora now. Only Nicephorus would brave our holy father, and Xiphilin knew it. He has long waited his chance."

"There is the Cæsar," answered Irene. "He was angered beyond measure with Xiphilin, and bade him be silent."

"John Ducas is a willow wand that bends to any breeze. He was frightened perhaps—not angry," answered the Lizard. Then Eudocia silenced him.

"Peace," she said. "Prate of other things."

"Did I not tell the truth when I declared he croaked and croaked?" asked Michael.

"Make him ask us a riddle, or tell us a story," begged Euphrosyne.

"Come, then, so I will," answered the dwarf. "I'll do both, and first give heed to a true tale of a ghost, girls."

He drank wine and spoke.

"Dion, the Syracusan, after he had freed his country from tyrants, with great glory to himself, sitting in his house about noon, beheld suddenly a woman in habit of a Fury, of huge size and most hideous ugliness. Without speaking a word she

swept the floor of the chamber with a broom, and perceiving her to be no human thing, but a spectre, Dion lifted his voice and called his people, whereupon she vanished into the air. And, even as Dion, we may soon see dark spectres wielding their ghostly brooms within the palace, for what followed to that hero? The evil pre-signified by this phantom came swiftly upon him. His son perished of an accident, falling from his chariot, and conspirators lay in wait and slew Dion himself under his own roof, thereafter dragging his wife and daughter to prison. Thus was his house swept clean indeed."

"Oh, hateful Lizard!" cried Michael.

"A riddle now—a riddle," ran on the little man. "Come, the reason for mankind, Maria?"

"Not mankind nor womankind can tell the reason," replied she.

"For a right good reason too," declared Irene. "It's not on earth. Not all the wit of all the wise, alive or dead, can tell."

"Perhaps love could," said the Empress.

"Can Saurus?" asked Euphrosyne.

"Yes, I know," he replied. "Such a pearl should be kept close; but since none of you will believe me, no harm is done. The mightiest truths run

naked through the world for lack of credence to clothe them. So they outrage our all-conquering falsehoods, and go to prison for indecency. We are here for a condiment and sharp sauce, to keep the celestial dishes from tastelessness. That is the whole matter. At the immortal dinner-party up aloft the gods drink blood—not wine—to keep their chilly ichor warm. Man means death—the tiger in the arena. He gives flavour and counter-flavour to keep the meal sapid. For unto them this death of ours is the unknowable and wondrous thing, the fascinating mystery, the cream they can never taste. Our incense makes them cough; our sacrifices bore them to despair; but when we're at each other's throats, then they wake up and clap their hands and laugh, to see what ridiculous and bloody pains we take to make our short days shorter."

"Never will I believe it," cried Irene.

"Of course you won't. I said you would not," answered the Lizard.

"The reason for us is hidden with God," declared Maria. "He wills that crown of knowledge shall be denied us here."

Bardas entered at this moment with Theodora.

"Bardas came into the world, I'm sure, for Theodora's happiness," declared Euphrosyne.

"It is well said," answered her mistress. "Mayhap we all come into the world to win our eternal salvation by bringing happiness for others."

She turned to Bardas.

"You know Malthus?" she asked, and he said that he did.

"Red Malthus of the prisons, Majesty? I know him well enough."

"Go to him then; and let him hear that 'tis our wish you share his present task. Take up your quarters there, for there are now two beside Marmora who must be treated as becomes their state. Attend Romanus Diogenes and Nicephorus until we summon you again, and see that their apartments look toward the sun and stand high upon the southern face of the great tower."

"Malthus is a surly bear," declared Bardas. "His calling turns him into Cerberus. I'll go at once and gallop. May Theodora come, Majesty, to ride with me an hour and return?"

"Let me go with him," begged Theodora.

"Who would separate soul from body? Not I," answered Eudocia.

They departed together, and Michael spoke to his mother.

"Bardas has bought a gift for Theodora,"

he said. "A black monkey with a sad, white face."

"That sounds more like a monk than a monkey, Prince," laughed Saurus.

Then returned Gregoria with the singer and two musicians. The island-girl was tall and full-bosomed, clad in purple, and decorated with tinkling, brass trinkets. Of the two men with her, one played a pipe, the other a theorbo, or arch-lute—a great, stringed instrument to accompany the voice.

"The Cyprian, Zöe," said Gregoria. "Pray let her sing to you, Majesty."

A line of poetry passed through Eudocia's mind and she repeated it, as though to herself alone.

"Upon that land the foam-born leapt to earth,
And morning laughed with a new loveliness
When her shell stranded on the expectant shore."

She turned to the kneeling singer.

"What can you sing, Zöe?" she asked, and the girl answered.

"Of all things, Majesty."

Eudocia smiled.

"Then sing to us a song of love, my nightingale."

"And let it be a happy song," added Irene. "We want no dumps."

The Empress, however, was not of her mind.

“I will no happy song,” she said.

“A song of sad love then,” added Gregoria, “but not too sad.”

“There are more songs wrote and sung of sad love than all other things,” answered Zöe.

She reflected a moment, then turned to the musicians. They sat to play, and the company also reclined. Saurus took up Theodora’s silk frame and proceeded with her work; Michael went to the fountain, kicked off his shoes and dabbled his feet among the black and silver carp that swam there.

The flute throbbed and the arch-lute drummed gently while Zöe sang.

“THE SONG OF THE WREATH

“Where are the orange flowers I hid away,
So silvery and bright,
My sisters wove
Out of their love,
To make a little wreath upon the day
That saw me bride,
When sunshine died
Upon this wedded night?

“Oh, perished sweetness from my mother’s home
Under the olive hill,
It was not dew
But tears that slew
Your loveliness; and mine to this has come.
Would ye were now
Gold on the bough
And I a maiden still.”

When the last notes had ceased, Eudocia spoke. "May you never feel what you so sweetly sing," she said. "Give the girl this."

Euphrosyne took a bracelet from the wrist of the Empress, and the singer thanked her, bending low.

"Hail, Majesty. Your slave doth bless your gracious bounty!"

"And now she's rich enough to taste unhappy love herself," commented Saurus.

Eudocia desired no more music, and the musicians departed. Then Maria spoke in her gloomy fashion.

"Full many a wife hath wished her wreath back upon the bough," she murmured.

"But what is that to me?" asked the Empress, as Irene rose.

"Well, rude hunger is digging at my old ribs," she declared. "He waits for neither grief nor joy, nor God nor man. It's time to eat and drink, my Empress."

"Depart—all of you," answered Eudocia, "and leave me awhile. Go your ways. My appetite is sleeping."

"There is better bread than is made of wheat; and God help those who do not sometimes hunger for it," said Saurus. Then the company entered the

palace, and only Michael was left with his mother. At the same moment the silver doors opened and the guard changed. Two rows of metal-clad men departed; two rows took their place, to stand as silent and motionless as the pillars of the outer balcony; and since they were beyond earshot, Eudocia and her son held them as no more human than the columns of stone.

“Now you’re alone,” he said, lifting his feet out of the fountain; “alone with only me, mother. That’s how best I love you.”

“I’m never alone—with you, Michael.”

“You’re safe enough,” he assured her, “now that I wear a dagger. It is sharp too. I cut my thumb this morning, but that’s well again. Why are you sad and pouting, mother?”

“How do you know that I am sad?”

“I always know, because your lips keep comforting each other, and your tongue peeps out sometimes, to try and cheer them up, and your eyes stare at things you can’t see. Why don’t you laugh, like other pretty girls?”

“Perhaps I have nothing to make me laugh ‘like other pretty girls,’ Michael.”

“Why have you not then—you, who might have everything?”

"I'm lonely," she answered, "but nobody can endure to be quite lonely, so Romanus told me. If some one loved me, Michael—then, perhaps, I should be lonely no more, and laugh at the others—they who do not love me."

"Everybody loves somebody," the child assured her. "If people love you not, mother, then make them love you. You're the Empress. You have but to command and say, 'Love me,' then the whole world must fall down and love you."

"I only want my share of love, Michael—the love of just one real, living man would be enough I'm sure."

"Why only one? An Empress should have ten thousand men to love her, and die for her."

"Let all love the Empress and one love the woman, Michael boy."

"Where is he then? He shall be brought, though we send to the moon for him, mother."

"You love me well enough?"

"Of course I do."

"And many others you love too?"

But he shook his head.

"Not many. It's tiring to love many. Only old Lizard—I said I hated him, but I don't—only old Lizard and Nicephorus. Oh, how sad—how sad! Must he be a monk? I should have thought there

were enough already. And he indeed loved you. I know he did, though he's so ugly. Ugly people can love as well as pretty ones."

"So thought I, Michael. I thought that he was faithful. Now they say I must not trust him. So only my boy's left."

"I saw Romanus go—he was gloomy, and terrible to look at. Lizard swore Romanus loved you too."

"And dies for it—did he tell you that?"

"Romanus dies! That huge man to die! I'm sorry then; I'm very sorry he is going to die, because he was so strong and so beautiful, like a statue made alive. Oh death is horrible—I hate it—I hate it, mother. Why do you kill people?"

"You saw him marched away?" she asked.

"Yes; we climbed upon the wall and watched him go with the strange soldiers—and they were angry."

Michael broke off, filled with an inspiration. He looked anxiously at his mother, sideways, from under his dark brows. He was desirous to speak his thought, yet feared a little. At last he plucked up courage, while in her mind Eudocia watched Romanus Diogenes enter the prison by Marmora.

The boy's voice broke tremulously on her ear, and brought her back to him again.

"Mother sweet—mother sweetest, if—if great

Romanus loves you, don't you think perhaps it is a pity to kill him? Because—because, if you kill a great general when he loves you, all the rest will feel a little frightened—won't they?"

She smiled, and seeing she was not angered, he put his arms round her neck and his face close to hers.

"Oh forgive—forgive him just this once," he whispered. "To pleasure me, mother. It's far easier to forgive than you might think—I know, because I've tried it!"

She cuddled her cheek to the child's, and was happy for a little while.

"You're a darling!" she said.

C H A P T E R I I
THE PRISON

CHAPTER II

THE PRISON

§ 1

THE apartments of Romanus Diogenes in the State Prison on Marmora stood at the summit of a great tower that sprang directly out of the sea. Under a full moon the waters rippled to its base, breaking there in little waves, that flashed a thread of silver along the stone. The living chamber had been sombrely furnished. The walls were frescoed in tones of auburn and dusky purple; upon the eastern side hung an ikon of gold, and before this emblem was suspended a lamp in a ruby glass. Upon a table in the midst stood another lamp of Greek workmanship, the oil cup and wick of which were carried by a squat Silenus astride a wine-skin. Near it stood a large brass hand-bell, a book or two, a beaker of red wine and a salver containing grapes and figs. A couch extended against one wall, while round the table were drawn massive chairs. The window, shooting upward in three tall

lancets, was uncovered, and the lamplight did not serve to kill illumination from the moon, which twinkled in the clear glass and flung down a pattern of light upon eastern rugs that covered the floor.

Into this cage, where the Governor of Thrace now passed his waking hours, there entered three men, to find it empty.

Two were wrapped in dark cloaks and hoods, while masks concealed their features; the third, who had brought them, was uncovered. He stood taller than the visitors, and displayed a massive and brawny shape, a head and beard of Venetian red, and a face of stern aspect.

Malthus, Governor of the State Prisons, had brought these persons to see Romanus Diogenes. They came armed with a signed mandate from Michael Psellus, which insured their admittance, though Malthus knew them not.

“Where is he now?” asked the taller of the two masked men.

“With Bardas, playing chess,” answered the chief gaoler in deliberate, heavy tones. Then he voiced a grievance.

“Why is the Patriarch’s brother sent hither? Does Eudocia doubt me that this poppinjay——?”

The stranger spoke again.

"It is her whim and means nothing. He'll soon be gone."

"Busy fool!" growled Malthus. Then he prepared to depart. "Bide here and I will send Romanus to you," he said, and so left them.

Alone, the pair removed their masks and threw off their hoods. Then the Patriarch addressed his companion, Michael Psellus, now Prime Minister. Xiphilin, it seemed, had something to confess, and his instinct prompted him to an explanation very needless in his present company.

Psellus and he were come in secret that they might win the fallen general with a lie; and while they waited, Xiphilin touched upon the ethical significance of their deed.

"Falsehood," said he, "still labours under a stigma; and it is well that it should be denied the herd. But what say the Fathers, Psellus? They rightly hold that it be permitted under certain circumstances. Thus, if a sinner stand in the shadow of death and damnation, and a falsehood will secure his life, he may use it, that his days shall be lengthened and afford him time to repent and save his soul alive. If, therefore, a man be allowed to speak what is false to save himself, how much more shall untruth be justified when employed to save the soul of a fellow man? For our duty to

our neighbour is to love him as ourself. To take a higher flight, how amply, then, is the falsehood privileged that would save the State and the countless souls depending upon its security."

"It is a weapon which may well become the patriot," replied Psellus, entertained in secret that the Patriarch should be at so much trouble to present his conscience spotless.

But Xiphilin proceeded to a profounder consideration.

"Indeed, one can say more," he continued, "and after long and prayerful pondering upon this deep matter, light has come and I perceive that the question of the origin of all evil is to be explained in very direct terms. It is not a complicated problem, as we make it by metaphysical thinking, but a difficulty that yields to common sense. For what can be more elementary than the fact that good and evil, even as light and darkness, or heat and cold, depend upon each other? Without wickedness there could be no goodness at all; without falsehood, truth is an empty name. Thus operate the categories of earth; but I conceive that our words 'good' and 'evil' have no meaning in heaven, or hell, where opposites are reconciled by the absolute. Eternity, Michael Psellus, lies beyond such con-

cepts, even as nature lies outside them. They are but the scaffold erected by human consciousness, the machinery by which civilisation and the greatest good to the greatest number may be advanced, if not secured. This is not milk for babes, but you will comprehend; and it follows that good and evil alike are merely instruments put into our human hands to employ with wisdom and high purpose. A fool can be trusted with goodness alone, and commanded to keep within its limits for the common weal; for evil is two-edged, and only to be employed by the mighty on mighty occasions."

"You beat the air," answered Psellus. "Until man has agreed what is good and evil—what is right in itself and what in itself is wrong—the terms are as easily changed and exchanged as those we apply to the weather. To-day sunshine is good; to-morrow the rain makes goodness and the sun spells starvation. Our task is to win Romanus Diogenes, and with him the armies, for the welfare of the State, that we may the easier empty the throne of a woman whose weakness grows dangerous to all. That done, since the object is good, any efficient means to attain it must also be good. One does not seek for a straight stick to kill a snake

if a crooked one is at hand. The value of the stick lies in its power to kill the snake. Who can affirm what is spiritual loss, or gain? To-morrow gives to-day the lie, and good and evil are only the colours on a chameleon reflected from its situation."

He proceeded to the present.

"Did you see John Ducas this morning?"

"I did," answered Xiphilin. "He grows exceedingly fearful. The man's a coward, but cowards are easily controlled. The Caesar is pig-headed. Constantine, his brother, was the like. All of the race of Ducas are pious and obstinate."

"To make him follow, believing that he leads, is no great task," answered Psellus. "As for this soldier here, we must edge our appeal with the abundant love of life and freedom that belongs to such a man. He'll be impatient of this stern mewling up, and long to spread his wings. He does not guess how formidable his strength becomes."

"His ignorance is deluded easily," replied the Patriarch. "Once set him free at the head of the armies, owing, as he will think, his life to us, and he'll do our bidding thankfully enough and help to make the Caesar sure."

Then there entered Romanus, soberly clad, his great neck and beautiful head ascending above a

sad-coloured trunk and hose, that served to reveal the splendour of his frame.

Their faces were turned from him, and he spoke before he had recognised his visitors.

“Well, my blackbirds, and have you come to end it? Has she been merciless and denied me death in the open?”

Then the Patriarch and Michael Psellus revealed themselves to the soldier’s amazement.

“Xiphilin—and you! Is it from Eudocia Augusta you come?” he asked.

“Happily not,” answered the historian. “We’re here unguessed by all. We visit you for reasons of State alone.”

Romanus recollected the last occasion of their meeting, and supposed that the head of the Church must for ever be his enemy, even though Psellus were not.

“The Empress knows nothing of your coming?” he asked.

“Nothing, nor shall she. Give close heed to us, Romanus Diogenes, for your existence depends upon it—and far more than that.”

The listener was in a measure reassured. Had these men pretended friendship, he must have been at once convinced of their insincerity; but that they were here for weightier reasons than his welfare

imparted a suggestion of truth to what they told. Yet the soldier quickly found himself doubtful, for Psellus cast him into confusion. Truth and untruth to his ear struggled in the historian's statement, and the lie was too large.

"Eudocia has made decision," began Psellus. "Her judgment was swift, but her sentence on your crime is in its nature slow. She has taken your folly in a spirit that you might have foreseen had you known the Empress as well as we. To-morrow you are to die."

"So be it then," answered the culprit.

"So it shall not be," replied Michael Psellus. "The Church and State alike say 'no.' Think not it is the man, Romanus, whom we are here to save: to pretend so would be to insult your intelligence after what passed at Court. But you are a soldier and the leader of these hosts now quartered in the city. You are, therefore, a very needful piece in the game that is playing now. You guard more squares than you guess at, and your destruction to-day, at the gust of a woman's passion, might breed grave and far-reaching disasters. That, indeed, she knows well enough; but so she has willed it, setting a personal revenge on your mad audacity above the call of the hour."

"This sounds incredible to me," declared Romanus.

"Nothing is incredible where woman holds the reins," replied Psellus. "Your great crime has twisted her reason somewhat out of bias—a thing easily done—and she does not perceive that, though you merit death, the needs of the time demand your freedom, if not your pardon."

"A tyrant, Eudocia!"

"That is she, Romanus. Her nature welcomes excuse for secret cruelty, and her fire leaps on the just and unjust. None, indeed, is safe until a man fills the throne of the East again; and so it must be filled, for our design is to lift the Cæsar, that he may share sovereignty with youthful Michael, son of Constantine. In your power it lies to advance these salutary steps; it is at once your duty and your good fortune so to do, for thus you establish your own loyalty to the house of Ducas, and secure the highest place the army holds, when Cæsar shall be Emperor. And—if that counts—you are, by the same stroke, quits with the woman who now means to shed your blood."

"What has Eudocia willed for one who would have died for her?"

"Not the sword of the Saracen. You are con-

demned to be burned alive. In secret you will perish, for she fears the Varangians. Her sentence is devilish—a pretty sample of the way women use their feline wits. The legions are to be hoodwinked, and when you die, they will learn that you have escaped by Marmora, to join the Seljouk Turks and fight for Alp Arslan against the Empire."

"Burned alive! Good God of War!" murmured Romanus. "She plotted that against me?"

Then Xiphilin spoke.

"An Empress does not plot: she wills," he answered. "I love you not, Diogenes, for you are a godless animal; but since the statesmen have invited my opinion upon your threatened doom, I am content to leave your life in the Hand of an outraged Maker, and preserve it from your insulted Queen. And that I do, believing that you may not only serve this kingdom, but perchance win time to remit the reward of your own blasphemies by faithful duty done."

Diogenes regarded them silently, almost sullenly, for a moment, while they waited for him to speak.

"I saw no such fate in her eyes," he said at last.

"Women can train their eyes to lie as easily as

their tongues," answered the Patriarch. "The truth of them is hidden in their hearts—out of men's sight."

"To burn alive is no new thing to me nevertheless," declared Romanus.

"Only lack of imagination prompts to flippancy at such a moment," said Psellus impatiently. "We are not here to bandy words, but indicate your peril and offer salvation—at a price."

"Yet we will bandy words," replied the soldier calmly. "We will at least exchange opinions, for I doubt this tale. Eudocia never thought to torture me. Her record is not hidden: she is a clement prince, and the world knows her to be merciful. Those who have died for crimes committed since she reigned have not suffered our barbarous mutilations or devilish torture, but perished at a stroke. Not she would burn a man alive . . . you lie to me!"

His voice rose till the vault of the stone roof echoed.

"Take back your lie," cried the minister, and Xiphilin intervened.

"Romanus, it is to your credit that you are slow to think evil, as all men should be; but in thus seeking to doubt of Eudocia's purpose, you accuse

those who would befriend you. Be not so foolish, for what is your fate to us outside the mightier fortunes hanging upon it? If you perish, the armies run out of hand, and something not far short of civil war appears between our barbarian forces and the city troops. You know who would conquer—those you lead; and did they hold Constantinople for an hour, their first act would be to avenge your destruction, for it cannot be concealed from them. What would they do? Sweep away the brother and the son of Constantine like straws; and so you die traitor to the late Emperor. But live as we bid you live, and you play a worthy part to the dynasty. Therefore escape this night and be the soldiers' oriflame again—a force for right and honour in this distracted Empire. Your head is thick, but loyal, Romanus Diogenes. Therefore use the brains that God has given you, and lift your own fortune to its desert."

"There is no dilemma here to waste two thoughts upon—if you are sane," added Psellus.

But Romanus withheld them. Upon the man of letters indeed he spent no more speech, but Xiphilin he answered sternly, and left no doubt of his determination.

"With two tongues you speak," he answered,

"and I believe neither one nor t'other. You are hiding truth, and you are not here to serve the sovereign, but to advance your plot against her. I'll keep no trust with you, Patriarch."

As he spoke Bardas entered with the Governor of the Prisons.

Xiphilin's brother exclaimed :

"You here—and Michael Psellus!" he cried in evident fear.

Then Romanus thundered his gathering rage.

"Bid them begone," he shouted. "Despatch them out of my sight, Malthus, or I shall forget that they are old, and dash their heads together!"

"Holy God!" gasped Bardas, "do you know who speak to you!"

Xiphilin drew Psellus away.

"Come," he said. "Ours the familiar reward of well doing, ill repute. The man is mad."

He turned once more to Romanus.

"Think better of it, soldier," he urged. "Ask yourself again what are we to you?"

"Rank enemies and traitors while I draw breath," replied the other.

"Then earn your fate, noisy fool," answered Michael Psellus. "Worse than fire would light you down to Dis, if I had my way."

Xiphilin drew his angry companion aside.

"We need waste no more words here. Let us seek the soldiery. They must tear him out of prison against his will if it can be done."

In a moment the pair were gone, and through the silence that followed, Romanus panted like a furnace while Bardas and Malthus stared at him.

"Dogs! Mongrel dogs!" roared Diogenes, while Bardas groaned.

"Like enough you'll die for this," he said. "My brother knows many things, but never how to pardon."

"A rascal—a cunning, loathsome rascal, Bardas—a traitor to heaven and earth, I tell you!"

"Hold your tongue, man! The walls have ears. Your strength is an infant's when opposed to him. His intellect pierces all mysteries, disarms and crushes all foes. He has the first brain in the Empire."

"None need fear a knave," answered Romanus, growing more calm.

"All will soon fear Xiphilin, and for very good reason," replied Malthus. "He has now chosen to become a Statesman and handle higher matters than the Church. A time is coming when Xiphilin will twist this nation round his finger like a ring;

and they who bend not to his will are fated to be broken. Nicephorus knows it."

"Why came the Patriarch to you, Romanus?" asked his old friend.

"Unless he and that cursed writer lied, I die tomorrow," answered the soldier. "They say that she has willed that I pay for fire with fire. Because my heart burned and men saw the flame, now must my body burn. Yet do you, who know her, credit that?"

"To burn you—oh, monstrous crime!" cried Bardas, "oh, most unqueenly crime! Yet, if they told you so, it is true enough. God pity the unfortunate wretch who wakes her anger."

"To burn alive!" exclaimed Malthus, "that was never sentence of Eudocia's."

He left them then, and Romanus continued.

"I looked into her eyes," he said; "I plunged into their steadfast depths. There was no murder there."

"But trust her not and hope nothing," urged Bardas. "She's a most ungrateful woman—aye, and cruel as hell. Even I have smarted under her scorn. I am her Protostrator, as you know, and it is pretty generally granted that never monarch had a better. The world acclaims my mastery of horse

and hound, and all things pertaining to every royal sport. Nobody has the wit to make such hunting—I am a Nimrod; and on horseback, as you can testify, it is as though you saw a centaur—man and horse one."

"She does not love your capers?"

"She is cruel," repeated Bardas. "Not only before my official accomplishments, but in a matter personal and sacred to myself. I am espoused to Theodora—the first confidante and favourite of the Empress. They were children together, and now that girl is the dayspring of my life, the very breath I draw. The world for her is empty without me, and we pine an hour apart. Yet, Eudocia, well knowing what we are to each other, cares not a jot for our passion. She hates love, as many others do who have not tasted it; and hating love, hates lovers also. Thus your case is the blacker, for she will neither forgive nor forget the thing you did. She has a heart of ice under her affectation of sympathy. Indeed I think she'd banish me for espousing Theodora, if she dreaded not my brother."

"She dreads no living creature," answered Romanus. "She was not made to fear; but terribly she errs to drop Nicephorus now. All soldiers know it. Given his guile and craft to hold back the

Turks a few months longer, while we made haste to build——”

“His head is shaved,” replied the sportsman. “He has become a priest. He is very calm, and by no means so weary of life as you might suppose. He’ll much lament your murder, comrade, for murder it will be. And bitterly I shall mourn it, as a vital loss to myself, besides a disaster for the State. We’ve had good days together, Diogenes. I’m somebody, however—yes, somebody, thank God, and I will do what a man may to-morrow. Eudocia loves my betrothed, if indeed she loves anybody but herself, and Theodora shall plead for you. Her voice hath a quality to dissolve a flint. It is small, yet as sweet as a wood dove’s. Oh, what a wicked sin, Romanus, to speak slightly of me in Theodora’s ear! She stood beside the Empress at Court when you were tried. I marvel you did not observe her. But I have her picture. It lives beneath my left nipple, as near my heart as possible.”

Bardas drew up a miniature that hung round his neck upon a little golden chain.

“She’s beautiful,” admitted the other, regarding Theodora’s radiant features where they smiled from a little tablet of ivory.

“Far lovelier than the queen,” declared Bardas, “and of a far nobler nature and spirit.”

He restored the picture to his heart, and made farewell.

“I shall yet storm the Court for your life, and flout the personal peril of so doing. But if nought avail against her and my terrible brother, then—then, old friend, do not forget me and Theodora when you come to Heaven.”

§ 2

Romanus stood for a little while when the practitioner had departed.

“There’s a lie thrusting its poisonous tongue in my affairs,” thought he. “And how to fight a lie with both hands tied behind me—who can do that?”

He turned from the table and went to the window. Moonlight rained silver over the sea, while far away, Prinkipos, amid the Isles of the Princes, rose faint and dim.

Here stood the general in the darkest moment of his fortunes, stunned with the horror of what he had heard, yet hardly believing it, while in his heart burnt a new and strange emotion. Nothing

had, indeed, been further than real love from his mind when he spoke the idle words that now threatened to destroy him; but since they were spoken, since he had actually been called to answer them and stand before the wronged Eudocia, he was, in truth, fired by a fervour of passion. Into his virgin heart it stormed tempestuous and wonderful—the revelation of woman; but it was seen and felt on the brink of his grave, where now he stood. He did not lose all hope, for he was a sanguine spirit; but his ambition rose no higher than at first: to die at the head of his armies. What reaction, and what impression the courage of him and his trenchant speeches, so frank and free, had created within the mind of his Empress, he did not consider. She had, indeed, spoken of tortures, but not, he remembered until he himself had whispered of kisses, thereby most certainly earning the promised flames. Yet, as a child can sometimes read a woman better than may a man, so his impression, that his Empress bore him no fatal ill will, was not mistaken. He clung to it unconsciously.

He debated with his eyes on a little ship, that crept dark-sailed against the moonlight; then Malthus reappeared, and with him he brought a

stunted creature who wore a dark mantle and a peaked cowl.

It was Saurus, who carried a parcel wrapped in black cloth.

“What tiny man are you?” asked Romanus, as the dwarf sat down panting, after traversing many steps with his short legs.

“One that yields not to wealth, nor power, nor beauty,” answered the Lizard; “and being so sane is naturally called lunatic.”

“Saurus, the poor Court dwarf, has come with a mandate,” explained Malthus.

“Why ‘poor,’ you red ruffian? What in your grim lot makes you pity mine? Dwarf—soldier—gaoler—are we not the self-same earth?” asked the Lizard.

“Yes—when we are back in earth,” answered Malthus; “but while we play our parts, a man may pity a midget.”

“Why? Where is the special privilege to stand six feet off the ground and groan for ever under the cares that are demanded of so much humanity?”

“They are a part of manhood, shrimp,” answered Romanus. “ ’Tis a sign you deal with a man when you can put a man’s burden upon his back.”

“Or a camel, when you can load it with a weight

worthy of a camel. So wags the world, Diogenes. I much hate work and yet am made to work, while you, hungering for detestable toil, are denied it. I sigh for peace; you think only of wars. Yet I am wrong there, for if you had dreamed of nothing but your business, you were not here now. And yet I am wrong again, for is not love every proper man's business at least once in his life?"

"As for peace, little fellow, that's a taste easily acquired," admitted Romanus. "But only if you lack ambition. There should be no peace when you are doing man's work—whatever it may be. Peace is stagnation. To be left in peace is to be slighted; to be sent to peace signifies that your work is done. I'd rather use my life than waste it."

"Most lives are wasted in the using," answered Saurus. "But I'm here on business, great general. There is a festivity at Court to-night, and a swift chariot waits my return. I bring a message from Eudocia."

"Happy little mite, and much to be envied! What is her blessed will, my atom?"

"No, no, I am not the actual messenger. I come only to prepare his way. By no gate does he approach, nor ask the leave of Malthus. Here are the lad's wings."

He opened his parcel and dragged out a rope-ladder fashioned of ivory and silk.

“This,” explained the Lizard, “must be lowered from your casement. So he’ll mount. But, look you, make it fast, for the boy to climb it is one counted very dear unto the Empress.”

“Is there, indeed, a lad dear to her?” asked Romanus.

“Her son, Prince Michael, doubtless,” said Malthus, “but surely he——?”

“Fear not. He is my charge, and I’ll have no pranks in the moonlight for a coming king, even though a rope-ladder is more stable than a throne,” said the dwarf.

“Do I hear true, that I must die?” asked the prisoner.

“As true as you’re born, soldier. Mayhap of her imperial mercy, she’s sending you the means to quit without help from the hangman.”

Romanus took the ladder.

“How if I tarry not for her messenger, and use this rope to take my leave of Malthus?” he asked.

The red man laughed; but he did not fear.

“That costs my head,” he answered.

“Nay, this gossamer was not meant for a man

elephant," answered the Lizard. "Wait in peace and sooner trust even women than the sea, for they have hearts sometimes: Marmora has none."

"Why, if indeed it is so, must Eudocia take his life, Lizard?" asked Malthus.

"By way of boon if that's her will," replied the other, "since no man's happy till this plaguing breath is out of him. But why suppose her merciful? He has committed notorious crimes, and the Empress perchance knows that she will best destroy him by using him, and punish with life instead of death."

"That is all I pray," declared Romanus.

"Then more fool you, for all your six feet of silly brawn. You dared to declare love and she was the last that heard of it. But he who eats figs before they're ripe must get a blistered mouth, great Diogenes, even though he be as good and beautiful a piece of innocence as yourself. If I were she, I'd devise a pretty torment for you. I should employ you upon a task so difficult, so delicate, so cursedly dangerous, that death itself were luxury compared with failure."

"Are these her purposes, or your jest?" asked the general.

"Our royal one I think was suckled by a tigress,"

answered Saurus. "She is terrible when she is roused—terrible and swift. The Cæsar's growing bald: that's well for John Ducas, because only so, when the time comes, may he escape shaving in his turn."

"And not the first who lusted for the diadem and found a tonsure on his pate instead," growled Malthus. "But you talk treason."

"While others act it," said Romanus.

"Shut the casement," continued the Governor of the Prisons, "and save your nostrils, Marmora breathes foul in her sleep."

The ladder had been lowered, and its last rungs were lapped by the wavelets that broke a hundred feet beneath.

"This city supplies the several scents and stenches of the world," declared Romanus. "All that are sweet and all that are sour drift through your streets. I pant for the open marches, Malthus—the smell of woods, the fragrance of the thyme and mastic and myrtle—aye, and the reek of flesh-pots upon camp-fires. Your city-bred wretches know not even the savage glory of hunger."

"Life is but fume and perfume," said the Lizard. "I could reduce to a whiff of odour everything we call existence, and reckon life in terms of the nose."

Keep watch by the casement, prisoner. A black pinnace with a golden beak, and bank of twenty oars at midnight."

"It's midnight now," declared Malthus, as the dwarf prepared to depart. "Can you find your way, Lizard?"

"My way!" cried Saurus. "Did I not fester here for six good months, and waste a summer with your red beard for telling the truth to Emperor Constantine about his scholarship? To be jester to a monarch without humour—what a fate!"

He was gone, and Romanus spoke from the window.

"The sea's alive with little ships to-night," he said.

"Pray God it will not be alive with enemy's triremes before the Birth of Christ comes round again," answered the other. Then his prisoner proclaimed an approaching pinnace.

"Here she comes like a black dragon—tearing a silver line through Marmora!"

Malthus turned to the window.

"I hate these silly pranks," he said. "What are doors for?"

"Windows are doors if the Empress wills. They're here," answered Romanus. Then, as the

great vessel backed her oars and presently drifted under the rope-ladder, he shouted a caution to an active youngster who had already seized it, and was preparing to ascend.

“Have a care, boy! Go slower—a monkey takes more heed. Steady—you’ve got a mile to climb yet before you’re safe.”

He kept his eye on the small, black figure ascending, and spoke to Malthus.

“He’s swaying like a spider on a thread.”

The Governor of the Prisons had bent from the window.

“A royal pinnace sure enough,” he grunted.

“Leave me then with the lad. If I have need of you I’ll summon you.”

“No craft, Romanus?”

“A soldier’s word, my friend. Well you know that you can trust me. If my mistress wills me free, you shall be satisfied of the order before I obey. Go rest and sleep.”

“‘Rest and sleep!’” growled the gaoler. “How do I sleep while you keep this sea-borne company? Prisoners sleep better than those set to watch them.”

A face appeared at the window, but it was

masked under a black cap, from which flashed a solitary scarlet feather.

Romanus offered his hand.

§ 3

As Malthus went out, the climber came through the window and leapt to the floor.

“Safe, my young night-hawk,” said the soldier. “A mariner must you be to climb a rope like that. I feared we had no sailors left.”

He saw a slim, neat and youthful form in a page’s costume—all black and close-fitting, save for a purple scarf about the breast and the feather in the cap. More than that he saw.

“Good God in Heaven!” he cried, then he fell, as though stricken through the knees, and made obeisance.

Eudocia took off her mask and flung it down impatiently.

“How did you know?” she asked. “Saurus told you, and shall suffer for it.”

“Blame him not, Majesty. Your eyes, not the dwarf, told me.”

He rose and stood before her with bent head.

“Can eyes speak?” she asked.

“In Persia they would forget the sun and worship them if you were there. Have I not seen them already? How should I forget?”

She surveyed him, but steadily and without suavity.

“Guess why I have done this,” she said, and he answered that he could not.

“Because I want to look at a man,” she declared, walking to a chair beside the table and flinging herself into it.

“Are there no men at Court, Majesty?” he ventured, answering her dark eyes by standing to his height and crossing his great arms upon his breast.

“Did you see any? Nay, you need not pose and strut, Diogenes. It is not breadth and height, nor bone and muscle, that build men. They share the stuff they’re made of with the creatures who go on pad and wing—more beautiful and worthy than human kind. Your speech, not your shoulders, proclaimed you a man to me. They use you well?”

“They serve me well; there’s only one can use me, Majesty. That’s my Queen; and since she has deigned to fly hither by night, like a rare migrant bird, I pray her to let me speak, and then she shall learn how God has put this deed into her royal brain.”

"I very well know it was the thought of my God," she answered, though not with conviction.

"And why? To save your throne against two dark rogues who plot its instant downfall. Do you know that the Cæsar aims at sovereignty?"

"Poor brother John," she replied, almost with pity. "He aims at nothing higher than to hide his byzants, save his vintage, prosper his treasure ships and live in peace. They've thrust this upon him in the name of righteousness, to gain their own ends. His terror, not his conscience, sides with them."

"Since you have willed I am to die," said Romanus, "again I implore that you will let me fall fighting for you alone. Grant that much, Eudocia Augusta. Waste no wood on me; faggots are better burned to cook your meat than roast your slave. Who should eat me? You may yet need the sticks for your winter hearth, and wish them back again."

She puzzled at these things.

"Who spoke of faggots?" she asked.

"Your first minister and his Beatitude, the Patriarch of the East. They seek to save me from your avenging hand if they can."

He still spoke lightly, for his heart leapt, and he knew that he was saved. More, perhaps, than that he knew, yet could not have found words for the dim hint of such a revelation. Indeed, he doubted,

even while a conviction slowly took shape in his bewildered brain. The times were free and spacious. It was little wonder that even a queen should amuse herself in secret thus; but for no prank was Eudocia's nocturnal adventure undertaken. He felt convinced of that.

"They meant that you should thank them for your life, not me, and for gratitude take arms against your rightful lord," she said.

"Let me sweep their heads off their necks!" he cried.

"To save your life from me, who thirsted to take it, and bring you to your soldiers, that you might turn your blade against a woman and drive her down into darkness."

"The knaves knew me not," he answered. "How should they know soldierly honesty when they saw it?"

"Some might weep at this," declared Eudocia, looking into his face. "I laugh, for the net they spread is doubtfully strong enough to catch my feet."

"Let my sword cut it," he urged; "bid me and my legions deal with these traitors, Majesty."

"There is only one way by which soldiers can get the better of statesmen, Romanus Diogenes;

and we have not reached that way as I think. Nicephorus, before he fell from grace, warned us that they of our own household were our foes. Would that we could have trusted him."

"You were wrong," he said.

"How do you dare to say that we were wrong?"

"I dared to love you," he answered. "Little matter else what I dare. You were deluded, and will terribly err to destroy him."

She considered. Once a relenting gleam hovered on her mouth, but she banished it. Then, to his joy, she became personal.

"Soldier, you were a fool," she began. "Not first for loving me—that was your own mad affair—but for blazing abroad your love in common ears. For that I well may punish you. Had you told her most involved—why then, at least, your crime had been hidden from an outraged world, and she might have found a way to forgive. How can she now? What do you know of love—a being dedicated only to war?"

"Nothing of love I know, save that I love you," he answered. "With such a love, Eudocia, that giant though I am, all made of steel and marble, my knees shake while I stand before you."

"Sit then. I would not have you shake. But it

is a touch of ague belike? Our city breeds fever on summer nights."

"Not ague looses my joints and makes them tremble in adoration," he answered. "When I looked on your divinity, my love was created, for I have never loved a woman till now. It sprang out of your eyes, broke chrysalis and soared as high as heaven's gates in one passionate terrific moment. At a flash, being so near I saw——" he stopped and sighed.

"What did you see?"

"The ineffable."

"Have all my soldiers such flowery tongues?" she asked.

"No tongue can speak what I saw then," he answered. "Yet you demand to know, and I must strive to tell. Behind the awful symbols that you held, beneath the crown that flashed like a rainbow on your glorious head, I saw—a woman—the first that I had ever seen to understand. Then the rest was as nothing. There only remained the fairest wonder made by God in some moment of supreme inspiration. I saw the dew upon her lip, the violet deeps of her eyes, and the lashes that bent to worship them; and I saw her bosom lifting as she breathed, and her hands, that made the orb and

sceptre coarse and clumsy against their heavenly workmanship. And I knew that all living men must love and adore such a woman though they died ten thousand deaths for it. I was human, therefore I loved ; and my heart has made songs of joy and thankfulness ever since, that it should have lived to love before it ceased to beat.

“And still I adore you, with a passion far greater than myself, Eudocia—a passion so immense and immortal, that when I’m dead and gone it must for ever remain and haunt your royal side undying. Yea, when the sunshine breaks a cloud, to pour gold upon your path ; when the trees whisper and fold you in their murmurings ; when the birds break into sudden song of worship over your head ; or when some stream utters its liquid music at your feet, answering your unspoken thought, as quiet waters will ; then know henceforth, the light and song and little voices are Romanus.”

He lowered his head in his hands, and she looked at the close, curly hair under the lamplight. Unknown to him she shut her eyes and smiled a moment ; but never yet had he seen her smile. For a few seconds she did not reply, then answered, though without any sign that he had interested her save by his statement of a fact.

"You, too, found a woman in the purple? The Patriarch made the same sorrowful discovery after you were gone to your doom. And harshly he rated me for daring to be a woman."

"Unfinished wretch!"

He stretched out his arms over the table until they nearly touched Eudocia. She looked down upon his beautiful hands, palm upward, extended towards her.

"Light of Heaven! when you came to be the Empress, did you cease to be a woman?"

For the first time her voice shook, and she could not trust her eyes; but she escaped by pretending mirth.

"You are finding out as quickly as you can," she said. "Rash boy, you should be trembling, instead of which you're—you're making love to me."

"Love! Think it not," he answered. "This is but humble talk between a slave and his Queen. If I made love, I should make it as I make war, Majesty. I should not twitter then, or coo like a turtle. I could never mince and ape and dance about a woman. The she that I loved would soon find herself in a whirlwind. But now my fires can never burst to flame. I'm modest, meek—a peni-

tent at your footstool. I speak upon death's cheerless brink. I loved a memory first—a dream, remember—the dream of you beside my dead lord. But now I love reality and am dumb."

Then suddenly he heard her laugh—like a chime of bells.

"If this is to be dumb—God help those who hear you chatter," she said.

But he shook his head, and in his turn preserved solemnity.

"Speak yet again," she said, and he obeyed, but dared not share her mirth.

"I am a ghost already, and with a hollow voice I tell the dangers which I may not share, and from which I may not shield you."

But in his soul he began to know better now. She also knew that he comprehended.

"Proceed—if I must hear," she said; "and banish your melancholy: I have enough of hollow voices and hollow heads at Court. Let me win something from this adventure that I could not have won without it."

Romanus took the hint.

"Your clothes," he explained. "What infinite peril—what insensate risk! There's not a single

woman in all the city but would hunger to kiss such a paragon of pages!"

"I love my black, and often don it on moony nights," she answered. "It was a thought I had, to play at being free sometimes. A queen should see her subjects close—in their homes if she can—even when the homes are prisons."

"What say you? 'To play at being free?' Are you not free as air?"

"I free? The men cooling their heels in the pin-nace and cursing my delay are freer than Eudocia. You are more free than I."

"Who then is free on earth?" he asked, and her gleam of happiness faded.

"The Patriarch. With him lies the supreme power in Constantinople now. His chains are heavier than mine; all the vital secrets of the State are in his brain alone. Already there is much hidden from me, though not what they design for me. And now, through all this far-flung realm there's not a man, Romanus, to defend my right and challenge Xiphilin. Not one, I say, and I dare you to deny it. I, who might have done so much with manly aid! We're sinking into nothingness, soldier; we shut our eyes to the movement and progress of the world, nor is there anything alive and precious in us to compensate for the loss of

power. Our Art is dead; our Science is dead; our Letters never lived."

"They had no chance to live," he answered. "We substitute for books the homilies of monks, and condemn as false to Christ all that wise men thought and told us before Christ came. But to know our evils and to see them evil is a brave step to curing them, Majesty."

She brightened again.

"How closely we agree, Romanus! I have often wondered, did fortune lead me to a man, whether he would see eye to eye with me."

"You living light!" he cried. "You jewel of the world, speak no more of lost liberty to me. You are omnipotent and, had I lived, my eyes had seen—"

"Why so much set on death?" she asked.

"Not I: it is you who are set upon my death," he answered.

She made a show of weighing the problem still.

"My little son told me that you should be pardoned. He said that if I slay a great general for loving me, the others may grow anxious. To let you live because you love me—is that enough to make your life worth living? Just to love—love from afar, and labour?"

"It is enough. Thankfully I'll live—live to teach

the nation to fight for you ; live to make your people bless and your enemies fear ; live to right your wrongs and exalt your glories."

"And what the price of labours so gigantic?" she asked, and he lost his opportunity, being for the moment blinded by promise of liberty and his own ruling passion.

"Leave to perform these things is payment rich and rare," he answered. "I pant for the field, knowing our daily loss and the gathering contempt of our weakness that will nerve the arm of your foes when we do meet. The Turks laugh at us in the heart of Phrygia, Majesty. So loaded are they from our treasuries that their women carry their spears and swords, leaving men's hands for weightier things. But give me the power and I'll drive them beyond Euphrates at a breath and, with my second wind, deliver all Armenia. It can be done even now."

She brought him back to herself.

"Queens there have been—brave, wedded queens who went to war," she said.

"Such glorious women braved vast perils and bore themselves the guardian angels of their armies," he answered.

"I, however, may not wed, Romanus."

"Let me but hear the name of man linked with your own, and he shall die by this hand!"

She flashed at this, but it was only sheet lightning.

"Who, then, are you to roll your eyes and claim the right to jealousy?" she asked. "What if I love? How can any woman's heart beat bravely on if it be empty? Must the mightiest in all the East be also the loneliest? Have I no skill to love, think you—I, who could love grandlier far than any woman I have ever seen, aye—and be as big a fool as any maid over some stupid man?"

"A stupid man, Majesty!"

"A stupid, idiot of a man, if I say so. Are not all men stupid?"

"Eudocia Augusta could never love a dolt," he assured her.

"Tell me the measure of a man I might love then."

He considered, and was honest with his ideal.

"One fearless in thought and act; one not uncomely and worthy to stand by such an Empress—a man who loves the realm only less than he loves you. Against the heart of such a hero you'd be lonely no more, Eudocia; but he must be a man of huge patience and self-control, of a sound judg-

ment, and a living force in world affairs. A statesman and soldier both should he be; and since few are such, then let him prove modest enough, wise enough, to court the ablest men and make them serve both you and him—not for fear, but loyal love. At home your husband should be such an emperor; and, when he took the field, the nation's light and saviour. And higher yet, above all else that I have named, he must be one of honour unspotted, to stand with a single heart and pure before his God."

She bowed her head, rejoicing to hear him speak thus.

"Even such a man is within my eyes, Romanus," she declared after a moment's silence. Then she lifted her face and regarded him steadily.

"Within your eyes?" he echoed, rather blankly.
"Where is there such a man?"

"Look in them and find him," she said.

He leapt to his feet panting.

"I such a man, Divine One?"

"And more and more than that!" she cried.

"Dayspring of Light!" swore Romanus almost glaring upon her.

But she held up her hand.

"And yet I fear," she said.

“Call it not back, call it not back!” he implored.
“Let the blessed words remain, my morning star!”

“A queen alone of all unhappy women must confess love if she feels it, since no subject dare,” explained Eudocia calmly. “And so we lose a joy our humblest fellow women command by right—to hear themselves entreated. But I blame you, and you must heed me. It was no sign of greatness not to know your greatness. I liked you far better as my fearless prisoner at Court. The minds are only second-rate that undervalue their own gifts—dear heart.”

“Not for me to question, Majesty,” he answered.
“I’ll never doubt my genius again.”

“What then?” she asked.

“You know.”

“‘Fearless,’ you said—‘fearless in thought and act.’”

“I love you.”

“‘Against the heart of such a hero you’d be lonely no more.’”

“Come to it then!”

She approached him; but he knew the tremendous strength of his arms, and was gentle.

“All that I have shall be dedicated to you, glorious love,” he whispered. “My hand, my brain,

my soul. I will be your lightning to let loose on the round world—your sword, your shield, your adoring lover too."

She shut her eyes and was silent a moment in his embrace, then put him away and sank into a chair by the table.

"Love is a perilous glory," she murmured, holding her hands over her breast. "Your awful fire is beating at my heart, Romanus; I hear the music of the flames—I hear them, I hear them."

He knelt beside her, but did not touch her again.

"This, then, is heaven," he said. "They are right who tell us a man's heaven is of his own making."

"I burn you! The torch is yours."

"Wed me, Eudocia, and the earth will lie vanquished at our feet. No power can withstand us two."

She shook her head.

"My oath—my sacred oath, Romanus."

"Bid me throw St. Sophia's to the earth, and tear the parchment out of your accursed Patriarch's hands."

"He must be one of honour unspotted, with a single heart, and pure before his God."

"Is it unclean that we set out to sweep away the

unclean?" he asked. "Let this oath, spawned from callous craft, be vanquished and annulled. Make me the minister of righteous Heaven to free you."

"'Heaven helps the wisest,' so said Nicephorus," she answered. "Are you wise as well as brave, my treasure?"

"He was wisdom, light, and air to you. And therefore the rats and beetles hated him and strove for his destruction."

"My Michael loved him too, Romanus. Infancy has subtle senses that adolescence loses. I begin to fear that I did a great wrong to cast him down."

"They did the wrong, not you; but you can right the wrong. Oh, my love, my crown, my glory, call him back to serve you yet. He is here—at hand—under this roof. Awaken him—bid him come to you and hear this world-shattering thing that has happened to us."

"He will not forgive me, Romanus. He cannot," answered Eudocia; but the man felt no fear on that account.

"He'll not forgive you, because he never blamed you. He understood that you had no choice. His philosophic mind works with that large wisdom given to the old, who still can laugh. He has no illusions and yet enjoys the full tide of life. His

thoughts are ever upon his Empress. Last night we played at chess, and he declared the game greater, because purer, than war or politics."

"Who won?" asked she.

"Nicephorus did," admitted Romanus—"not, however, very easily. I kept forgetting everything but the Queen."

"Summon him then, since you command."

"I entreat; I do not command. He's shrewder far than Psellus, subtler than Xiphilin, honester than either. They would never have risen to face a fallen fortune as this man has done. So big he is, that he makes his fate look small."

Romanus struck the bell upon the table, while Eudocia declared that she hoped little from her fallen minister.

"Men are at their worst wakened from sleep," she feared. "He will be dull and slow. Shall I reveal myself?"

"That you cannot fail to do: he'll know you fast enough," promised the soldier.

§ 4

When Malthus entered, Eudocia, who had resumed her mask, addressed him.

"Nicephorus, the fallen minister, must now

attend Romanus here. Brook no excuse. If he sleeps, waken him. I come from Court on urgent matters."

The Governor was in bad humour.

"No doubt, my chatterbox. Since when has the Empress chosen to send urgent matters by Hop-o'-my-Thumb through windows?"

"Hasten—hasten, Malthus, good friend. Every moment is precious," declared Diogenes; and when the other had departed, Eudocia turned in triumph.

"He knew me not," she said.

"Nicephorus must."

"I'll wager he'll never guess," she answered.

"What will you wager?"

But then her animation waned.

"Nay, we must be serious, for I see no hope, my brave one. What, after all, can he do that we cannot think? Our love is crossed and counter-crossed. It is marred by many dark and fatal stars, Romanus."

"We will forge our own fate, not leave it to the spinning of distant stars," he vowed. "You are my star and I am yours. Let the rest grow pale; I do not fear them."

"Twin stars—you and I—to circle lovingly, yet never, never meet," she sighed.

"Such love as ours will crush the obstacles

between, for it is mightier far than they," he answered. "Do you not feel unconquerable? Your love would make a mouse a hero; then what shall it make of me? Rest sure that soon we shall blaze together in one united orb of power. Read only that in the stars, Divine One."

And then Nicephorus appeared. He wore a long close gown, with sandals upon his feet, and his white head bore the tonsure. He yawned—a drowsy, old man, wakened out of slumber.

"What now, Romanus? Is not noon of night sacred to these ancient bones?" he asked.

"Here's one full of weighty secrets—a messenger direct from Eudocia Augusta," declared Romanus. "He wills——"

Then the Queen interrupted him.

"Nicephorus must hear me," she said.

At her voice the old man started and did instant obeisance, while Romanus smiled.

"Would I had made that wager," he whispered.

The fallen minister drew his gown about him.

"I am in no case for audience," he murmured, now wide awake enough.

"How did you know me?" she asked. "Your eyes are dull with sleep, you yawned in our faces."

"But my ears are quickly wakened, Majesty.

Your voice, like our cathedral's silver bell, has a note that once heard we do not forget."

She took off her mask and faced him.

"I am here to beg your forgiveness, Nicephorus. Is it mine?"

"There is nothing to pardon, Majesty," he answered. "Effect must follow cause. I'm not too far gone to know that."

"Then we three are friends," she declared; "and we two command you, implore you, sustain and help us in this great moment, with the past forgiven."

"Poor, patient past!" he said. "May it forgive mankind as willingly, for we need the past's forgiveness often enough."

Then he turned to impatient Eudocia.

"But you have shaved my head, Majesty."

"The brains are in it still, Nicephorus."

"An ancient head should be kept warm."

"Nay—brains are better cold. We need a brain of ice and steel. Romanus Diogenes and I are one now—one in heart and hope—and love. Such things will happen to a woman, Nicephorus. And well I know they do not happen without the Almighty will them. There's only you to trust. You are our pharos above the storm that's brewing, the last of the tradition—all vanished now, but you

—that gave us half the world. You must return; you must come back to me before it is too late. The Cæsar's being driven to the throne like a sheep to the slaughter; the soldiers shout and roar for my Romanus."

"Is there no later news from Court, Majesty?"

"I have told you. We love—this man and I are one henceforth, to breathe and see and think and act. That is the stupendous event."

Nicephorus regarded them with deep respect. But he said nothing.

"Sit here between us and speak to us; cheer us, encourage us; say this is good that I tell you," entreated Eudocia. "You should rejoice to know that I am happy. You must be happy too, Nicephorus, and use your mighty wits to make us safe, as well as happy."

"Farewell, Mount Athos!" exclaimed the old man, half to himself. "So fate is no respecter of persons, and would pick me out of her play-box again—to make another game for the gods."

He took a chair beside the table, while the Empress reclined at his right hand, and Romanus sat upon the table at his left. For a moment there was silence, then Nicephorus addressed them.

"Man and woman, you stand upon a precipice,"

he said. "Therefore look back and hear me patiently awhile. When first the Greek was driven to ally himself with Rome he was free still. But soon he cringed, for most of his heroes' blood was drained away, and lost his honours, until Vespasian laughed at him, taunted him, and truly said that he had forgotten how to be free. Severus threw all down; Caracalla built up again, after a fashion. Then came Gallienus and put us to the sword once more. But, like a shorn hayfield, we sprang from under the steel, until in splendour rose Constantine's city on Byzantium's ruins. Our past mocks our present, and our story sounds the echo of an echo. It tells one tale: our good and evil came from our own virtues and vices. Therefore, first estimate the quality of them you call your people."

"The people are black cowards. One laughs at them for fear one should spit on them," said the soldier.

"None save an idiot laughs at human nature, Romanus Diogenes. Satire's self is but a small and fruitless cleverness. The scourge cures no wounds, and satire has little excuse since the Saviour of all could don flesh and dwell amongst us. Men are black and white upon the surface only. A hero and a coward may jog in one skin and chance alone

decide which part the man is known by. Even as the sun itself, the noblest nature will often suffer most absolute eclipse. What, then, is the Greek?"

"The Greek is indeed two men rolled in one," admitted Romanus.

"Nay; he is three," declared the Empress. "I love him, but I have often found that he'll tell one story with his tongue, while his mind plots a second, and his act, when he is driven to action, may accord neither with speech nor thought. We need to create character and singleness of purpose and make our people trustworthy."

"To create character—a royal wish," said Nicephorus. "But for enduring achievement the material should be fine. 'Unstable as water, he shall not excel.' "

"Then Eudocia Augusta must mix the magic wine of her spirit with that water!" cried Romanus.

"Good. But listen first—here on the threshold of your tremendous adventure. A priest may preach. She's at the summit now, and all ways that lead therefrom are downward."

"I'll stop upon the summit then," answered Eudocia. "Justinian's Empress said that a throne was the most glorious of sepulchres. I will reign on it, or die on it."

“Are you sure, Majesty, that it is worth the sleepless and eternal pains? The throne has ever been a precarious, slippery perch in our Byzantium, and the royal bird a mark for many fowlers, being still a sort of master prize for the sons of men to gambol on. Quit it and you enjoy a peace of mind denied to monarchy; but cleave to it and policy must ever fight at odds with conscience in such a heart as yours.”

Eudocia displayed some indignation.

“Would you have me slink from my destiny for ‘peace of mind’?” she asked. “That peddling ideal of shopkeepers and citizens offers no charm for the Empress of the East.”

“Power is the last temptation of greatness,” answered the old man, “and the lust of it, like a false dawn, will often hoodwink and deceive the sharpest eyes.”

“Are you turned monk inside as well as out, Nicephorus?” asked Eudocia blankly.

“Fear must be your companion,” he continued; “sleeping and waking the infamy of the infamous hangs heavy upon your pillow, till the story’s told in one more drop of blood on the scroll of our grim history.”

“Thou ancient coward!” exclaimed Romanus.

"Was it for this the Empress called you back to her?"

But Eudocia knew Nicephorus better than Diogenes. It was his custom to paint the gloom of any picture first and come gradually to the brighter passages.

"Enough!" she said. "We've heard the monk until we are weary of him. Let him return to his former trade and be our dearest, first and best of ministers. The hooting of an owl is no sound for lovers' ears."

Nicephorus smiled.

"I'm Empress and remain so," she continued. "I'll reign, though my realm is desolation, and dust and ashes all I have left to rule. I will reign, Nicephorus, and I will love; and fear shall not dare to keep me company, for love casts out all fear. My heart I give into the keeping of this man; my soul rests where it always shall. The hand of Romanus, as I think, now holds the salvation of our State, and you are called to strengthen it—you, our sole trust—philosopher and statesman in one—Plato's ideal of which you spoke."

"Two taskmasters for one slave," he said.

"Romanus trusts you, and he does not err."

“I thank him for his good esteem. So we have come to the entrance of the theatre and must choose our mask—the tragic or the comic.”

“Tragedy surely lies before us,” declared Eudocia, but Nicephorus shook his head.

“I’m grown too old for tragedy. Let veterans go smiling in gentle sunset’s laughter, Queen.”

“You misread the times,” answered Romanus. “The wind that blows for Michael Psellus and the Patriarch should be sharp-edged and steely. To-night they came laden with lies to me.”

“To-night they came?” asked the old man.

“Even so. They told me that the Empress was fixed upon my immediate death, and bade me fly at once to my Varangians, that with the armies I might cast down the monarch and lift Cæsar to the throne.”

“And what said you?” asked Eudocia.

“I had looked into your eyes,” he answered. “Only a miracle saved them from death. They hopped off—black toads—to spit their venom elsewhere.”

“Such men are something too slight for tragedy,” mused the old minister.

“It is not them I fear, but Heaven,” explained

the Empress. "My oath to the royal dead darkens the way, not these living men. Beside Romanus they are shadows."

"But why the oath, Divine One?" asked her lover. "They who have been forced against their will to swear, swear nothing."

She shook her head.

"I will not escape so. I knew what I was doing. How say you, Nicephorus? Think ere you speak, for two lives and an empire hang upon your answer. Is there any way?"

"In the affairs of the spirit, the Patriarch must be allowed all powerful," he answered.

"But there are good spirits and evil," argued Romanus. "If a man is subject to the devil, as Xiphilin is, then he is not omnipotent."

"So love can quicken even martial wits it would seem," answered the elder. "Perchance your captain has the key, Eudocia, for if we hold the Patriarch is about to cast his vote with the black angels of treachery, then we more righteous folk may well propose a question to his claims."

"The price! The price!" she cried. "Even the devils have their price."

"The Patriarch is not a devil, Majesty. He is a very great and able man—a genius of many parts.

But he is vain, as men of genius often are. Pride is his only vulnerable point, and the more so because he knows it not."

"Then fling him out of power, and since you a priest would be, Nicephorus, let Eudocia Augusta elevate you to the high priest's place, so that this cursed fraud on parchment may be burned once for all."

Nicephorus shook his head.

"I did wrong to commend your wits," he answered. "Such fiery deeds would quickly send you where your Varangians could not help you."

"Why say so?" argued Eudocia. "If you, Nicephorus, were Patriarch and held it a seemly thing—"

"Ah! There's the hitch, Majesty. If I were his Beatitude, the Patriarch of the East, being not a vain man, and armed where Xiphilin is open; then who knows but that I should hold you to your oath? Let me be therefore and meddle not with my Roman conscience. But we have to deal with Xiphilin, and the case is a thought hopefuller."

"Oh, blessed man, you know a way!"

"Since Xiphilin is Xiphilin, Majesty, a way is within the bounds of possibility—I say no more than that."

“Kiss our hand, Nicephorus!” she cried, and he obeyed.

“The journey’s long,” he said, “and we must go in patience if we would reach the goal sought by you twain. The Fates, however, for once seem bent on comedy—at least for some of us—and Psellus and the Patriarch, though men with little laughter in them——”

“The way—the way?” begged Eudocia. “Why did you keep it hid? This should have been told in our ear long, long ago.”

“Why, Majesty? You never desired a way, nor could I have answered till now; for even if I knew that some day you’d love, I could not guess where the royal heart would come to rest.”

“You knew that I should love?” she asked.

“Because you’re perfect woman,” vowed Romanus. “Did I not well to pray that you would trust this subtle friend? But let him speak on. Can we uncut such a knot without the edge of my sword?”

“Without it, or not at all. Swords will not save us. Xiphilin alone hath power to serve the Empress now, and he’s a man of peace.”

“He’d rather die than loose me,” she declared.

“But when you wed, you wed the armies, and are impregnable, Eudocia,” explained Romanus.

“How may that be done, dear general, if only Xiphilin can let me wed? Even had he the power, which he would deny, he would refuse us.”

“Depose him.”

“But can the lady depose her conscience?” asked their counsellor.

“Forward then,” said she. “We trust you with our lives and loves, Nicephorus, and you have promised that a way exists within the power of royalty to follow.”

“Agreed; but there’s sour powder for your delicate tongue, Majesty, ere you feast.”

“We shall share it,” she answered. “And first, before I move a step, Romanus Diogenes must be a free man.”

“Indeed, no, Queen. The soldier stays here,” explained Nicephorus. “Into this labyrinth we must wind like a serpent, the clue, alas! guile. Take a false step and our comedy is turned to tragedy, our art all marred. Romanus shall be held in pawn for your mercenaries. The legions may play their part in the last act, not the first.”

“What of John Ducas?” she asked.

“He, good soul, must have the dust in his eyes a little longer. Trouble not for him, Eudocia. He’ll presently thank you on his knees for saving him from the terror of the purple. Intrigue shall be met with intrigue, and yours the move.”

“Intrigue is no weapon for imperial power,” she argued, but he convinced her to the contrary.

“You cannot set an army in array to fight a brace of weasels; we do not attack vermin with a phalanx. There are things only to be destroyed with smoke, and mean enterprises that may vanish under the wind of honest laughter.”

“Eagles do not catch flies, Nicephorus.”

“But flies can buzz about an eagle’s eyrie; and flies can sting. Our task, then, to draw their stings. Grant your Patriarch’s a wasp, then this most holy hornet keeps a pot of honey stored in his nest—is it not so?”

“My oath to wed no more.”

“To beg that honey is our plan, upon such plea as his invincible piety may grant.”

“Beg to him!” cried the Empress. “Beg to a lynx or tiger to lose its living meal! Vain words. You grow sleepy, Nicephorus. You’ll only win my oath when Xiphilin is dead.”

“Indeed, no: that would be to lose our last hope,

Majesty. He must not die, else all is lost. Xiphilin dead is Xiphilin spoiled and useless for our purpose. Listen now to what shall happen. Let a few days pass—then call me back to Court, but not to office. As a forgiven man I return, in charity with all—my foes as well as friends. Meantime Michael Psellus remains Prime Minister, and presently puzzles to know where I stand. He will smell a plot, but must not taste it until the hash be ready. Diogenes remains here under the shadow of your darkest ire. If he escape, my trouble and your love are both wasted. It is, indeed, vital that he should be fast bound—why, I shall tell you when I return to you. And now let me pray the Divine One to depart and seek her rest. I have to speak with Bardas."

"The Protostrator—what of him?" asked Romanus.

"He, of all worthless men, shall not be dragged into this matter, Nicephorus," declared the Empress.

"Nothing is worthless," answered the veteran. "There's a proverb, Majesty, that, hoard it long enough, and every piece of rubbish will be found to have its use. The turn has come for Bardas."

"But he is a man of no parts," she answered—

“a vain, futile thing, who lives for hawks and hounds, and shows in the hippodrome. He has won my own Theodora, and it is a grief and shock to me that one I love can love a Bardas.”

“The friendships of our dearest companions often shock us,” answered Nicephorus. “One may need self-control and patience to stomach our friends’ friends. But do not hate your showy Bardas. He can help us vitally—though not with hawks and hounds. Theodora, you say, has plighted her troth with him?”

“She has, but won no smile from me. She knows that I despise him.”

“Good. That helps us. You must forbid this match, Eudocia. You must decline to sanction any such betrothal.”

But she shook her head.

“Ask not that, though like enough you ask well. She loves him and I, who know what love means—I could not part them.”

“Yet I think you must,” he insisted. “If only for a season you shall break it off implicitly. Like enough the maiden will bless you in time to come. But you have leave to be subtle, not violent. Your part shall be to say no finite word, yet by your actions ignore this engagement, as though, for you at least, it did not exist. Bardas will do the rest, if

I know him. We must not deny the gifts of the gods, for they are not offered twice. Therefore smile upon your servant Bardas. Court him; demand his constant company; order his instant return, and favour him handsomely when he has returned. Bardas, believe me, is vital to the comedy. He was, perchance, born for these events alone."

"Shall I trust Xiphilin's brother?" she inquired doubtfully.

"You are not asked to trust, but only to smile," answered the old man. "We're often called to smile where we trust least. But Bardas will respond readily enough, and make the way easy. Bestow large friendship upon him and ready companionship."

"I hate to play so mean a part," she said.

"The game is nothing, the stake everything, Eudocia. An Empress of the East plays many parts; that is her destiny."

"Come with me now then—now—now, Nicephorus. By stealth return with me, and burst upon the Court to-morrow with the sun!"

She was already hastening to the window, but her ancient counsellor laughed.

"You shaved my head and would you break my neck?" he answered. "There is a mist on Marmora, and I have a catarrh. I'm tired and

very sleepy, Divine One; nor is my work done yet. Say your farewells and begone. Meantime we live for you."

He turned his back upon them, and lifting his hand put his great chin in it, while Eudocia picked up her mask.

"For Heaven's sake be careful, my little life," implored Romanus. "It is a cruel drop."

"Bid me be patient, not careful," she said, with her hand in his.

"The immortal only can trust time," he answered; "but I must be patient too. Would you were in your pinnace."

"My body will guard the treasure hidden in my soul, Romanus."

He embraced her, and she rejoiced for a moment in his arms.

"God guide your feet," he murmured.

"Has He not guided them to you?" she asked.

"Blessed silk and ivory to bear that load sublime," he whispered. "Oh, how I grudge it them. Do the boatmen know they rowed the Queen?"

"Not they. Farewell, Nicephorus. Come quickly to us."

"And gladly come when all's done here, Divine One," he answered.

Then carefully she descended, and at sight of her swaying above them the drowsy rowers made ready.

“She’s like a little night-moth, twinkling in the silver of the moon!” murmured Romanus, and his words roused Nicephorus from reverie.

“Your name’s unlucky,” he said. “Two have reigned Romanus—First and Second. But neither tempted the smile of fate. Think you, soldier, you are great enough for so tremendous a fortune?”

The other, however, barely heard him. His eyes were upon the descending figure.

“She is safe!” he exclaimed at last. “The pin-nace shoots away. We are alone. Is it a dream, Nicephorus? Am I a living, or a sleeping man this night?”

The other considered the question.

“A just distinction, for to sleep is not to live. Yet must we sleep to live and dawdle a third of our short time in shadowland, that we may employ the rest. Mayhap our Maker regrets that we do not slumber more. Eight hours of every day blotted out; and I like ten myself, when Hypnos meets me in a generous mood.”

“I’ll not eat nor sleep again until——” began the soldier; but Nicephorus stopped him.

“Make no rash oaths! See what a coil the royal

oath has brought to us, and go to your bed now. Sleep may not be your friend, but it is the best we old men can count upon."

"Shall I be weak while Eudocia is made of courage? Shall I sleep while she labours?"

The other struck the bell upon the table before he answered.

"Draw up the ladder and, if you must wake, spend the night kissing the rungs her feet have trodden. You will soon be free should I win my bout with the Patriarch; but at your peril make any attempt to leave the prisons sooner. No, not if Eudocia's self command it. Mark this gem."

He held up his left hand, whereon appeared a solitary ruby set in massive silver.

"That and that only must guide you forth. Now get you gone. I have to do with Bardas before I slumber."

Romanus drew in the rope-ladder and spoke as he did so.

"Shall I not hear what you must tell him?"

"Not half a syllable. Mad lover that you are, I should find your fingers on my throat, or his."

Diogenes stood in doubt at a speech so strange.

"I trust you utterly," he said.

"You must, my general," answered the old man; then Malthus entered.

"I was asleep," he grumbled. Then he looked round the chamber.

"Where's Hop-o'-my-Thumb? Hast eaten him?" he asked.

"Swallowed the fittermouse between us," replied Nicephorus. "We shared the creature's heart. And now bid our gallant Protostrator attend me. I have a message for him."

"Know you not that it is near two of the morning, Nicephorus? Do you set speech with that windy nothing before your wholesome rest?"

"We must mortify our weary flesh a little longer, and suffer fools gladly if they stand as high as Bardas. Be cheerful. He'll return to Court tomorrow."

"He's only fit for Court," answered the gaoler. Then, with Romanus, he departed and left the statesman alone.

§ 5

Nicephorus sighed, bent his brows, coughed and patted his chest. Then he shut the window and returned to his chair. He was eating grapes and planning his attack when Bardas entered in a dressing-gown, the curls of his beard screwed for the night.

“Not abed, old man? Remember monks keep earlier hours than courtiers.”

Nicephorus regarded him thoughtfully.

“The Arabs,” he said, “hold that our fate is written in the sutures of our skulls, which is Allah’s caligraphy, graven in the womb, and beyond human wits to cipher; but we know better, and guess every man’s fate lies in the brain his skull conceals.”

“What then?” asked Bardas.

Still Nicephorus surveyed him with the deepest apparent admiration. He plucked a white grape from a bunch and held it under the light of the lamp.

“No doubt your nimble mind has marked that this, our world, is very like a grape, Bardas? It holds both sweet and bitter; day lights it upon one side, while upon the other darkness shadows its rotundity. Both reach ripeness—one on the vines of heaven, the other in the vineyards of earth, and both gradually grow to their perfection. Presently they will shrink and all their treasure die. A bunch of grapes, or galaxy of worlds—Nature holds sun and berry alike.”

“Confound you! Have you roused me from my first precious sleep to talk nonsense, Nicephorus?” exclaimed the indignant man.

“When a grape is ripe, that is the time to eat it, Bardas. They say that you are vain and pride yourself upon more gifts than God has granted you; but I think not so. You do not guess the half that lies within your power. No need to tell you when grapes are ripe.”

“You speak truly. Indeed I am modest as men go, Nicephorus. I know my gifts—only a fool is blind on such a subject. But my powers are slighted.”

Nicephorus turned the leaves of a volume upon the table.

“Do you read Lucretius, friend?” he asked.

“Read a poet—I, that am one? No; I read in nothing but the book of life.”

“And skip a deal of that—most men do. Hence often come their deserved misfortunes. But much we may not miss. Strange that such piercing eyes—eyes that can see the towering hawk when it is lost to common sight—should have missed such a page of life as lies open before you now.”

“Not at all strange,” answered Bardas. “Am I not mad with love? What matters all the arid wilderness of open pages when a man reads two eyes aright?”

“In love? If that indeed is so, then should you

be safely caged with Diogenes. For are you not as great a man as the soldier?"

"And if I am?"

"Why, then, no doubt you'd love as high and aim as high. Only the highest would content you."

"The Empress? Good God, what senile dream is this, Nicephorus? I love her not—in your ear I do not even like her. Who should know her hard heart better than you, now cast into a monastery at her decree? I am betrothed to her confidante and first friend, the adorable Theodora. We only live when lip meets lip. But Eudocia hates to lose the girl, and frowns upon our love with most cursed selfishness and cruelty. I almost fear to speak before her, though no coward, as all know."

"Well may you fear, you witless fool! Indeed you are a madman—blind, deaf, rapt away from the terrific reality. It was time—more than time that we had secret speech together, for, in the struggle near at hand, I much depend upon you."

"You shall not tempt me from my duty. You are a prisoner and I am set to guard you. There can be no plots here, Nicephorus, and no intriguing. You have yet to know me if you dream of escape."

"Bat! Owl!" answered Nicephorus, laughing in his face. "It is you who are bound hand and foot! I am as free as air."

“A prisoner? I? What folly is this? Have the grapes made you drunk?”

“Credit me, Bardas, and face reality. Your life may hang upon it,” said the elder quietly.

“My life! I, that avoid politics as I would a snake? What have I done?”

He was alarmed and his dark eyes rolled, while he clutched his bedgown about him.

“What you have done, and what you have not done, make together a mountain of your shortcomings, my poor soul. Did not the Empress will me here to watch on you and mark how you took exile from her? Is it not for the sake of this night’s work that I have endured these prodigious dishonours? Come close. None save the crickets, that chant so huskily, must hear us. A mighty matter indeed! See, the moon sinks on Marmora, Bardas, and the very mists slumber. So shall all the world sleep, but you and I. Know, then, I still serve the realm—actively—and Eudocia—and you.”

“For God’s sake link not our names,” implored Bardas. “There’s danger in it—awful danger for me.”

He was trembling.

“You, too, might be a statesman if you would—and more than a statesman,” answered Nicephorus.

“Your sagacity, I think, should match your courage, Bardas. Nor is Eudocia without these qualities. None knows better than she—perhaps none so well—that the State has ever hated woman’s rule.”

“They rise young Michael with the Cæsar, and send her to a nunnery. It is as good as done, and I shall not pretend a regret I cannot feel,” declared Bardas.

“Whether indeed they do so will largely depend upon you and me,” answered Nicephorus, shaking his head with solemnity. “Eudocia has learned all particulars of their disloyalty. But we—you and I—to us she looks in her need. What think you quickened the imperial wits?”

“You, doubtless, if you have no desire to see her deposed.”

“Nay, Bardas: a greater far than I, and Eros is his name. She loves!”

“Romanus?”

“So well that he is here, and there runs a whisper abroad that he will die.”

“That indeed is so,” confirmed Bardas. “By fire she slays him; I had forgotten. In any case she could not love, and happily for men she may

not. Her oath draws her talons, and my brother will see that she is never absolved from it."

"Who can tell?" asked Nicephorus. "True love has always been a foe to the churchmen, and will often find a trick to circumvent them. A strange thing has happened—a great portent, and I welcome it as you will. There was but one man she might have loved with any shadow of hope, and the gods, all knowing, find that man."

His listener denied it vigorously.

"There's no such man in the world," he declared.

"I say he exists," replied Nicephorus, "and Bardas is his name!"

The Protostrator reeled into a chair and crouched there as though he had been a rat in a trap. He held his hand to his forehead and stared in horror at the speaker.

"Love me—Eudocia?" he gasped.

"That you should ask the question amazes my mind," replied Nicephorus calmly. "No doubt this wild-goose chase after her tire-woman has obscured your natural perception. Yet can you have ignored the tragic of her eyes—her pouts and frowns and slights, her wayward moods to send you upon this or that business, or change the time when you had

planned your hunting? Could you misread directions so clear, that only royalty had dared to give them? Look back and reconstruct the past in the gleam I shed upon your perilous darkness. Why, man, this night her thoughts are on you, and I have received a direct message from her!"

Bardas panted like a furnace; he mopped his head and stared upon the other as though he had been a spirit.

"Dear God!" he whispered, afraid to speak aloud. "Did the Patriarch dream of such a tragedy he'd banish me the kingdom, even if he spared my life?"

"The time has come to trust me, not Xiphilin—to trust me and your own rare self, friend."

"Folly—annihilation—the darkness of death, I tell you! He's a thousand times stronger than you; and as for me, he'd crush me like a poor, innocent insect if he heard of this."

"Do servants crush their masters?" asked Nicephorus. "Your wits lag, Bardas. You shrink below yourself a little. Here's a path straight to the throne! Is that clear to your understanding? With such a man as you at the head of the empire, things strange and new and wonderful would most surely happen. We, indeed, should hardly know ourselves."

“But is it true—true that she loves me?”

“Only play your great part, and she will love you even better than she does at this moment,” replied Nicephorus. “Rise to your destiny, my heroic Greek, and answer this gift of fortune in the voice of one who deserves it! Why, Bardas, both fates and furies are upon your side. They leave you little but a triumphal march. I see, indeed, no more than one cloud upon your sky.”

“Aye—a cloud with lightning in it for my head,” answered the Protostrator.

“Not so. It will be for you to wield Jove’s bolt henceforth. I only mourn for Theodora.”

“If that were all,” answered the other, “what should she matter now? We forget the glow-worm when the moon rises. A woman’s nought, Nicephorus: I know them well enough. One woman’s like another; but an Empress—I cannot credit this.”

“Your pride and ambition should surely help you to do so. Why may not Eudocia love you?”

Bardas reflected. He was growing calmer, but still lacked control of his voice.

“Of course you throw a light on many doubtful things if this, indeed, is true,” he admitted. “Her hatred of my dallying with the fair girl; her sending me on duties that detained me from her sight—these and a thousand other petulances that I have

failed to read. What took her? My horsemanship? And yet she never praised it. But, though one may admit, perhaps, the truth of this as not very amazing, the thing itself is impossible; she and you must know that, Nicephorus. If my brother were called away into a better world—if death overtook him—then—possibly—but only so."

"You must not hope for any deliverance there. Yet, if I have opened your eyes and inspired your ambition, all is so far well," answered the old man steadily. "A battle of the giants we shall have, Bardas. And for the Patriarch, fear him not at all. Leave him to me. Your part is pleasanter: to make swift amends for your most dangerous oversight, to play the gallant with all your charm and skill, that you may win her swift forgiveness. Easy enough will it be as you shall find. But take heed at every step, my lad; use all caution and the uttermost sense that God has given you. It is a stupendous task, even fate helping, to reach a throne. Reveal your courage and hope high. The man who courts a princess must work hard; therefore concern yourself with her alone. Give heed to none else, none other. Lastly, remember the fate that overtakes the spider's husband."

Bardas shrank again and turned to pale from red.

“Death!” he answered. “Why say you that?”

“For good advice. She is no spider, but has high spirits. And first cool the old love gently, firmly. Theodora, who thought you loved her, must be undeceived. Your experience and natural gifts will help you there. And one thing more. That all may go as you would desire, meddle not at all with politics. Set your heart only on Eudocia. Take no thought upon me, or any man, and when I presently return to Court, as visitor and friend, but without power of office, do not bate your courtesy to those who seem to rule—to Michael Psellus, Cæsar, the Senate. It must soon happen that the soldiers, hungering for him, will clamour after Romanus, seek him here and strive to get him. But that shall not be, for did he guess that Eudocia designed to lift you to the throne, he would smudge you out like a mosquito.”

“Another peril! But happily he is to die at once.”

“Think nothing of him. This place is proof against the Varangians, and we can win them at the right moment to the side of the Empress.”

“When do I return to Court?” asked Bardas.

“To-morrow,” answered the counsellor. “And see that you do so. She’ll welcome you and expect a change of vision, now that this mighty secret is dropped in your ear.”

“Follow me quickly, I beseech you; I shall need your voice and wisdom, if I am to rise to this dizzy height,” said Bardas.

“Fear not: I soon return.”

“And now for yourself?” asked the younger, still sweating heartily, and with a leaping pulse. “These are amazing services, and I am beholden to you for a change in fortune beyond my hugest hopes. Of course you mean a bargain?”

“Why, of course I do. It was certain that you would so regard it. All life’s a bargain, Bardas. Each huckster brings his basket to the market-place and hopes to sell his rubbish to some fool. My price can wait. I’ll win it out of the time to come. I aim at peace—at stern retrenchments and self-denials for us all. Then a mighty stroke launched on the Saracen. My highest dreams may depend on your forthcoming achievements, and if only you play your part, good shall follow.”

Malthus entered at this moment. He carried a lantern.

"The soldiers are broke loose," he said, and even as he spoke there came the distant murmurings of many voices.

"A noise to frighten kittens," answered Nicephorus; but the Protostrator was perturbed.

"Are we safe?" he asked.

"The prisons are impregnable," replied Malthus. "They want Romanus Diogenes. The murder's out, I find, and the Varangians have heard he is to die."

"Once he is dead——" began Bardas; but Nicephorus interrupted.

"Nay, leave him to Eudocia. Her opinion concerning him will know no change. Go, seek your rest against to-morrow. Malthus can assure the legions that their general is not to perish."

"Yes, yes, do that," urged Bardas, "then the night shall know peace. It will calm them and draw them off to their camps. To-morrow it is certain, nevertheless, that Romanus must die, and that will now be best. At daylight I withdraw again to Court and leave you in sole command."

He bade Nicephorus farewell until the morning, and departed. Malthus asked a question:

"Must the general die? Did Eudocia's messenger bring that ugly news to him? I've seen many

pass from here to death and wasted no sigh upon them, but the Cappadocian——”

“Fear nothing for him, save his escape,” answered Nicephorus. “Romanus is safe enough with you; but yield him up to no demand, whatsoever, until you have had speech with me.”

The thunder of distant voices rolled through the night, and Nicephorus continued:

“I’ll speak to them; and, for your ear alone, Malthus, I am here no longer as a prisoner, but for purposes of state. Eudocia and I are again at one.”

“Thank God for it,” answered the red man. “I do not want you here, and would rather welcome those you may send me than yourself. Come now and speak from the outer walls to these barbarians. They’ll heed you willingly.”

Nicephorus rose with a sigh.

“Sorry, sorry the stuff we mortal men are made of,” he said.

“Poor clay and coarse, most of us,” admitted the other.

“So coarse that few go perfect even to the firing, Malthus. The potter mauls a thousand upon his wheel for one that he turns true. If life be the art of God, then why does He make so few masterpieces?”

"Perchance in other worlds, if such there are, the material is better."

Then Malthus extinguished the lamp and they went out together, leaving only a pattern of moonlight to climb the eastern wall and silver the ikon that hung upon it. Landward the growling of the soldiers lifted and lulled; then it broke into a louder shout and sank back to silence, that Nicephorus might be heard.

CHAPTER III
BESIDE THE VINEYARDS

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§ 1

THE royal domain spread southerly of the palace, and where the gardens of pleasure ceased a semi-wild region extended to the vineyards. Here, in this mediate space, lay a nook beside a knoll whereon were scattered the remains of a little sanctuary. To other times and other gods it pointed, and in the midst of fallen pillars, where one or two still reared to carven capitals of the grape, there stood a ruined statue of Dionysus. The deity had lost his arms, his breast and trunk were much weathered, and moss was got into the vine leaves that adorned his hair; but still he possessed beauty from the golden time, and revealed, in limbs and face, a perfection unperceived by those who now came and went before him.

Beneath the temple spread a little amphitheatre of grass, while behind it rose a pine or two, lifting their ruddy trunks through thickets of oleander

and myrtle. For here ran a stream, and the flowering shrubs flourished with their feet in water.

Now, near four o'clock of the afternoon, there came the murmur of a brook and a louder murmur and hum of human voices from the vineyards not a hundred yards distant. There a thousand men, women and children were busy gathering the royal grapes, and to-day, following an ancient custom, the Empress designed to visit the workers, make festival, and move among them. Her resting-place was to be this green space beneath the ruins, and there, at sunset, the annual rite would end with a procession of the husbandmen.

As yet the prelude of this entertainment had not begun; but now two men appeared at the meeting-place and held brief speech before the arrival of the Court. Michael Psellus and the Cæsar came together, and Nicephorus was the subject of their conversation. Both looked anxious, and while the historian was cold and reserved, concealing the impatience that tormented his heart, John Ducas made no attempt to hide care.

“Have you spoken with him again?” he asked. “He shows no enmity that I have observed, and moves freely and cheerfully as of old; but that’s the man.”

“We have yet to be sure that he feels enmity,” answered Psellus. “There’s nothing visible as yet. He vows that he is thankful to escape office, and tells me that if it lies in his power to serve me, he will do so. He angles for my purposes, but deftly and with no indiscreet desire to know them.”

“Is he content, then, to play looker-on and feel the indifference he assumes?”

Michael Psellus shook his head.

“It is little likely. He never suffered passion to cloud his plans. His patience would restrain him. If he designs some counter-stroke—but what should he design? He cannot fail to know that we are right.”

“He cherishes no personal hate, though we planned his downfall openly.”

“Why should he?” asked the statesman. “He must grant that we had reason, for the proofs were plain enough. But that Eudocia should have called him back shows the man has not lost his cunning. I would give much to know how he achieved that. Once restored to her confidence, no doubt he had the wit to prove the treaty made in secret with Alp Arslan was no treachery—either to the kingdom or the throne—but how did he win her private ear? I do not find she favours him; indeed

my friends at Court assure me she sees little of him."

"That is true enough," answered John Ducas. "To me he shows a manner very urbane. He's easy, humorous and mild. But one thing troubles him. He told me frankly, touching Eudocia, that in the ten days during which he was retired she has changed. He finds her lighter and strangely, unexpectedly given to folly."

"Trust him not," warned the other. "If he thought her wrong he'd keep it hid. He knows well enough what is afoot, but not the approaching day and hour of it."

"But does he know?" asked the Cæsar.

"Most certainly he does."

"Then he may approve—not for our sakes, but hers. Is it not possible that, looking ahead, and only concerned with her future happiness, he already feels that deposition will be best? To-day, unless Xiphilin fail, we shall better judge his true opinion. The Patriarch has speech with him presently, and will dig deep. He, too, goes in doubt what means this return. He does not trust Niçephorus in anything, but is determined to probe him. The old man made no demur, and willingly agreed to a meeting."

“Has she spoken more of Romanus Diogenes?” asked Psellus.

“She avoids the subject. There’s a mystery hidden there, for she is acting out of her character. She was always quick in statecraft, and knows, as well as we do, that it is folly to keep him in prison. But thought of that man turns her to stone. I have prayed her to release him, and so have you. Our prayers, I think, preserve his life, but cannot win his freedom. I had not thought she could be so hard.”

“Cannot Bardas serve him with her?” asked Psellus. “He was a close friend of the general, and used to brag about it. Now they tell me that Bardas is taken into Eudocia’s highest favours.”

“Another mystery. She always despised the man, as one of her intellect might well do; but now she smiles upon him, and he walks two inches taller.”

“Nicephorus may know what’s in her heart,” answered the Prime Minister. “I hate this crawling, baffling uncertainty; but a week hence sees all answered. When Eudocia’s gone, Nicephorus shall vanish too—but not to a monastery.”

“He’ll drop his mask to-day—if indeed he wears one,” said the Cæsar. “Xiphilin is in earnest, and

will not be content with jests at life. He'll burrow to the bone and learn what Nicephorus truly feels about the things that are to happen."

"His great forbearance is not all it seems—be sure of that," replied Psellus. "I do not hope he will declare himself on our side."

"Your sense should see the danger, if there be one," declared the Cæsar. "You have the genius to don another's mental garment and so judge an enemy's designs."

"I cannot don his mental garment," confessed Psellus. "If he means to oppose he must have power; but wherein lies any power to his hand, seeing that the Senate and the army are ours? Yet I do not trust him."

"Do you trust Xiphilin?" whispered John Ducas, first gazing over his shoulder to see none might overhear the question.

The younger frowned and hesitated before replying; but an answer was not given, for now suddenly appeared Michael Ducas with his attendant.

Cæsar smiled and took the boy's hand, while Psellus saluted his future monarch.

"And has the Empress set out, Michael boy?"

asked John Ducas. "Yet I need not ask: I hear her trumpets."

"They are coming, but the bonny hawks do not fly to-day," explained Michael. "This is the day of the vintage, and my mother will pluck red and white grapes with her own hand, and the wine they make will be royal. And we go among the people and scatter money, and they sing their songs to us."

"We shall be there," promised the Cæsar. "Remember to find a rare bunch for me, Michael."

"So I will then, Uncle John," answered the Prince, "but the best and biggest bunch of all I find I shall keep for my mother."

The men departed to pursue their subject, and Saurus spoke to Michael.

"Forget not to pluck for Theodora," he said. "She will have none to pick for her to-day."

"I'm sorry—very sorry, Lizard; but I'll not pick for her. She's my friend no more."

"Why? You are fickle, Prince."

"My friends must be happy. Theodora's grown strange and sad. I hate sad people—they are so dull."

The guard entered and took open order about the

glade. Then followed pages and servants laden with cushions and rugs, tables and plate to set upon them. Wine and fruit, cakes and sweetmeats were spread out, and the place transformed as though by magic. After ten minutes all had been completed, and a little silver throne set for Eudocia in the midst. Then came the silver trumpets and men on horseback led by the Protostrator. Eudocia rode a black Arab, whereon her scarlet robe flashed like a fire; Theodora, Maria and Euphrosyne also rode, but Dame Irene came in a litter borne by four. All dismounted as the Senate arrived, and Eudocia welcomed old and young with animation and a heart far lighter than her counsellors guessed. For the elders were aware of the approaching stroke, and few believed that the Empress herself could be ignorant that her downfall must now be a matter of days.

The Court assembled round the Queen. The horses were led away. Having seen a purple awning quickly lifted, for protection against the westerling sun, Bardas took his place on a cushion beside the throne. Irene was favoured with a couch, but the rest sat or stood, while refreshments were handed to all who cared to partake of them. Then there was movement, and while they waited Eudocia's signal for the vineyards, men and women

strolled together, some examining the mossy marble Dionysus amid his fallen pillars, some walking under the shadow of the myrtles, or plucking rosy clusters of oleander bloom. In the sky was the first tinge of evening gold, but the heat had not yet abated, and Eudocia delayed awhile, to the satisfaction of those old men who shared the ceremonial.

§ 2

“Come, Theodora, sit by me,” said Eudocia, while the many-coloured movement of her guests made the dingle as bright as a rainbow. “We’ll rest a little while, then seek the grapes that Dionysus sent to help the world’s goodwill.”

Her tire-woman, whose countenance was sad, approached and Bardas jumped up with show of courtesy to make room for her, while Eudocia winced to see the pain in the girl’s face.

“We’ll speak together presently,” she said. “I’ll bid them go without us.”

But Theodora alike ignored her lover and the Empress. She sat silent and melancholy beside Eudocia’s footstall.

Then it was that from the chatter about the throne young Michael spoke.

"Let me see the lovely dagger that my mother gave you, Bardas?" he said.

The Protostrator handed him a brilliant toy set with gems and having a haft and sheath of gold.

"Take care of the blade, my Prince; it has a double edge," he said.

"It is not as sharp as mine," declared the boy.

"Shall you do aught with it but cut your nails?" asked Saurus of the Queen's new favourite, and Bardas, who hated the dwarf, having no ready answer, scowled at him.

The people came and went, and certain eminent men whom she had not yet welcomed were presented to the Empress. She was very gracious to all and greeted her guests gladly.

"What of the royal vintage?" she asked Bardas.

"All that's good," he answered. "It flows abundantly—a most generous year. There shall be enough of your imperial, golden wine for all the mighty of the East to drink."

"Pray we do not brew for our enemies. It is their blood we should lap, rather than wine," growled the Lizard; and Bardas, who desired to be even with him, scolded the little man.

"Weigh your words better, reptile," he said.

"Fear not. I learned to weigh them at my mother's knee," answered Saurus sharply, "and

when I failed to weigh them I weighed her hand on my ear. But no man shall weigh your words."

"And why not, imp?"

"Because they never weighed a poppy-seed, and never will."

"Think not because you cannot understand it that a word is of necessity light," replied Bardas loftily. "Men do not always mould their meaning to the wit of mice. The great must weigh their words: it is a part of greatness to do so, knowing what they utter will cast down, or raise up, and be the voice of prophecy for lesser men to mark."

Eudocia smiled upon him.

"Bardas, your speech is ever native music, whether you weigh your words or no," she said. "Saurus flings his thoughts like stones from a catapult, caring not what suffers."

"Indeed his aim is wild," declared Irene. "But they promise that our armies shall drink blood enough ere long."

"We have not yet forgot the road to fame and glory too," said Bardas.

"A road seldom strewn with silken cushions, however," snapped Saurus.

"Shall our throne never know glory and fame?" asked the Empress; and Saurus replied:

"Glory and fame, Majesty? What are they?

Glory's the lightning flash against a storm cloud and fame the thunder-clap that follows. They make us jump—that's all—and then both are gone, helter-skelter, and clean forgotten in an hour."

"You tell of false glory and false fame, mannikin," answered Irene. "Fame is slow-footed; it follows conquest from afar, tardily, doubtfully, marking what is lost, what gained. Fame is a cautious thing."

"Death and great deeds are nought to it," added the solemn maiden, Maria. "No, nor wreaths of oak and laurel. Long years must pass and a man be dust before the world can tell the truth of what his own generation thought too great, or held too little."

"That is time's ultimate justice, Maria, not fame," answered Eudocia. "Fame is a frenzied thing, born of immense actions and the rise and fall of dynasties and empires. It is a pulse of a nation's heart, a tempest, a convulsion. It is the wail of nations at the chariot wheels of conquerors; the smile of the world; the universal tribute poured out for saviours and heroes, alive or dead. Fame's triumph song soars to the stars. Oh, would that we might hear such music!"

"When God so wills, we shall," promised Bardas.
"Peace claims her victories too, Eudocia Augusta."

"And whither do they lead but to gorged sleep?" asked Saurus.

"Sting no more, bitter midge," answered the noble. "Leave politics: the game's not worth the candle. They blot the purity and emasculate the joy of life. Remember, too, there are spies behind every grass-blade. Who can say, among those bent heads hobbling behind us in the ruins, where treason lurks? Yonder marble god sneers at the pack of them."

Michael's treble pipe filled a silence. He sat beside Theodora.

"Play at cat's cradle with me, Theo, till we start," he begged.

But the lady shook her head.

"Nay, dear Prince. Ask Gregoria."

Michael snorted impatiently.

"You never grant the least small thing, Theodora. Instead you mop your eyes, and soon you'll cry all the blue out of them."

Theodora turned away at this rebuke, and Eudocia, rising, concealed her friend's confusion."

"Away into the vineyards!" she said. "Let all

go and we shall quickly follow. Despatch the guard, too, Bardas, and give them leave to pluck and fill their helmets."

"Hurrah!" shouted Michael. "Come on, Lizard, I know where the fattest bunches hang."

He was off first of the throng, and the glittering concourse rolled away; while Eudocia's guard, thrusting their spears in a ring where they had stood, followed after. A shout greeted the company as it entered the vineyards and filtered here and there among the lanes of the vines. They were strung on low trellises as high as a man's waist, and the folk gathered, then transferred the contents of their hand-baskets to great wains that waited for the harvest.

"Now, pretty one," said the Empress, when she and Theodora sat alone, "come close, closer, and put your hand in mine and tell me the meaning of these many tears, that Michael says will drown the blue of your dear eyes. Woman to woman, Theodora, and friend to friend."

"Woman to woman, Majesty?"

"Even so. I know you are unhappy. Now bare your heart to me and all its aches; and tell me, first, why have I lost your love, Theodora?"

"Do you need to ask? Woman to woman, you

know right well, Eudocia. I tell you it is a cruel, a wicked thing that you are doing—to lift him up to dream idle, idiot dreams. They are such visions as his own nature is only too prone to play with. And what man would not dream under such temptation? You are fooling him—why, God knows—and I must submit to see all—all that makes my life and hope—tortured for royal whims. And worse than that: you turn the man into a gull and laughing-stock for the Court. Oh, I could hate him now, for showing himself a blind fool, if I did not already love him so dearly for being himself. It is you who bewitch him, transform him into something he was not—beat a deadly light upon him. Yet how can I scorn where I have so deeply loved? How can I do less than weep my soul away to see him turned into a puppet, dancing on your tune? Woman to woman, you have come between this man and me, great Queen, in fashion most unqueenly. You bade me speak; now punish me, destroy me; I care not."

"Theodora," said the Empress gently, "we have been precious friends since we were little, happy girls together. And I remember how once we fell out bitterly about a doll. Who suffered then? The doll, not our love. The poor toy came in half between our furious hands; and when we found the

stuff our puppet was made of, common disgust made us kiss again. We swore eternal devotion over the mommet's ruin."

"A man is not a doll stuffed with bran, Majesty."

"Few men are stuffed with trash so honest. Would you keep all his laughter and jests—his merry eyes and his merry melodies to yourself alone? Must love be so greedy, Theodora? Why may not I win some pleasure from my Protostrator too?"

"What pleasure? You would make him your lover."

Eudocia frowned and flushed.

"You speak to the Empress," she said. "Have a care, Theodora. Your anger bears an evil sting of insult."

Theodora turned her sad eyes to the earth.

"'Woman to woman'—so you bade me speak, Majesty."

"I forgive. You had forgot my oath, perchance, and trusted to your jealous eyes; but from this day, pretty one, believe my words are truer than your sight."

"The wrong to him remains," murmured Theodora.

"The wrong to him?" Our wrongs come from

within—so we are taught. If Bardas loves you, as an honest man loves a woman, his heart is surely steeled against all syrens, Theodora—against the wiles of every other woman in the world. Tell me how he has changed to you.”

“He avoids me like the pestilence, in natural fear that you——”

“Think no such foolish thought, child. I do not rob my subjects, and he knows it.”

“Have you not robbed me of my old respect and trust, Eudocia? Have you not changed the aspect of Bardas to my vision?”

“Why, that’s serious,” admitted the other. “But you must build upon his actions, not mine. It is certain that I could not take from you anything you possessed, Theodora.”

“Oh, Majesty, be reasonable,” begged the unhappy maiden. “Who, then, has taken from me what I possessed? Who but you—you, who once treated him harshly, indifferently, and when I rejoiced to win his love, though living kindness to me in all else, were vexed and cold to hear my great news? Men are but men. Who is there but must run when Eudocia beckons?”

“Respect him, then, no less and blame him no more,” answered the monarch. “If he has but done

what any man would do, who shall censure him?"

"This is to play with words, as you are playing with me," sighed Theodora. "I love him, Queen. He swore to me that life was death apart from me; but now——"

"If I were in love——" began Eudocia; and the other interrupted:

"You are. Do I not know the signs—I, who have endured all their sweet and sour, felt them burn through me, and fought to hide that I was on fire?"

"Why, then, it is for you to pity me, not I, you," replied the Empress. "Answer now this question: have I once broken word to you in all our lives, Theodora?"

"No, never once."

"Then I promise this. You shall be the wife of Bardas, if anon you come to me and say you will to wed him. And of all my summer palaces you shall choose for my wedding gift which you will."

"I thank your generous Majesty. But how shall I wed him if his love be dead?"

"If his love were dead, you would not wed him, even though I commanded it. I know my Theodora and her pride. Her pride first won me. Think

this: his love is lulled to sleep by potent charms—not mine, Theodora, not mine; but potions brewed for other ends than his delight, or yours. Wait and be patient a little longer until Bardas wakens. Hold him but as a slumberer, who presently will move and rouse and rub his eyes and see Theodora standing beside his couch in silence, until his dreams are ended.

“Men are like butterflies, while we women nearerl^{er} resemble ants. The butterfly, finding an open flower, will only rest there while the sun shares his bright throne. When the cloud-shadow falls, he’s away to seek the golden light again, my Theodora. Men, you shall find, are greater slaves to pursuit of happiness than we. But if an ant meets some small treasure, how she cleaves to it through foul weather, or fair! How presently, with toil enormous, she drags it to her nest, or breaks her heart in trying. . . . You, too, shall have your treasure in your nest, love, if you still desire it when this tale is told, and all eyes are opened. Be very silent, very secret, very brave. Kiss me now, woman to woman, please.”

Nicephorus approached the Empress. He walked slowly, clad in his white toga.

“Join the vintagers and be of good cheer. Still

think him dreaming, and trouble him not until he wakes."

"You give me back my heart, kind Majesty," murmured the stricken maiden.

"I wish I could," answered Eudocia. "Perhaps some day you'll tell me that with deeper gratitude than now. Keep your heart safe, Theo, and treasure it for him that's worthy of it."

§ 3

The girl went her way with braver tread, mystified indeed, yet happier than she had been for many days; while the Empress turned impatiently to her old minister.

"The sad, tender child!" she cried. "It is a biting shame that she is called to suffer so. I've wrecked her happiness, and see her daily fretting out her heart for that base fool."

"Which fool?" asked Nicephorus. "There are so many and various at Court. But you mean your Protostrator. Well, is she blinded with her tears? Can she not perceive that you have mercifully rescued her from a bad mating? If she has not thanked you yet, surely she must."

"I am at the limit of my endurance, and will

play actress but little longer," she assured him. "Bardas is terrible to me—his smiles and dreadful gallantries. When he was timid one suffered enough; but now that he has grown bold, poor man—! But where is Romanus? Now's the hour and time appointed. Oh, I know he is near, Nicephorus! The birds are singing out his blessed name on every bough."

"And men are speaking it. Things rush swiftly to the climax. Only your nuptials now stand between you and destruction."

"Time will right all. But let me forget everything with him for one little minute," she begged.

"Forget nothing, Queen. He had my ruby, and came down your rope-ladder last night."

"He's near! He's near!"

"Yes—picking grapes with an earth-stained face, disguised as a vintager."

"Can anything disguise him?"

"Even heroes depend a little on their daily shards to show the men they are. Smeared with mother earth in rustic cloths, your general hoodwinks all eyes but God's. The Lizard is bringing him up the watercourse, and you will be safe here for a few brief moments. But run no risks, for we are at the climax of the plot now. The Patriarch will come

anon to worm the truth out of me—little dreaming that Satan lies in wait for him as well as I. The others hope to win me as an issue to our duel. Why, Eudocia, must falsehood ever travel hand in hand with State affairs? Why can man never accomplish his great national or international issues without lying? Why are our leaders ever liars too?"

"Nations trust their leaders because they must. Every storm comes to a head; every tumult and tribulation reaches its summit, like the foam of a bending wave. There will ever be the mighty few who lead," she answered.

"Yet, till they are all hanged, the humble many will know no peace."

"Mankind needs leaders, but ever lacks quality of judgment to choose his leaders," she declared.

"It is not that," he told her. "They often choose wisely; but there is an awful sleight in possession of power to modify character and, in politics, to weaken a man's honour. He comes to it burning with high ideals, thirsting to better the lot of the nation and the nation's people. Then steals the poison into his heart, and he finds that, as in art, the medium kills inspiration; so in politics the

possible is ever at odds with the desirable. Between 'practical politics,' as we call them, and ideal legislation, there is a gulf fixed, and in that gulf the souls of many men are lost."

"Until we will to work in the light, it must ever be so," admitted Eudocia.

"And the answer to that is this: While the staple of every nation is its fools, we cannot work in the light. Human ignorance, human passions, human greed are the obstacles, and the highest appeal, the noblest conviction ever falls upon the deafest ears. To enter politics is, at best, to make a compact with the Evil One, and to endanger our immortal part. Yet who fears the peril, or sees it till too late?"

"Bardas smiles and gambols like a monkey on a pole," she said. "Yet blood is thicker than water. He's true brother to Xiphilin at the core, and already talks of power."

"Dangerous operations are performed with little knives," answered the old man. "Humour him but a short time longer after you are free—if, indeed, you are freed. Within an hour we may know the best or worst."

"God sharpen your wits," she said earnestly.

"Pray that he will dull Xiphilin's. I may misread the Patriarch. Here comes Saurus. Be wise and speedy. We run a needless risk."

"No, no," she declared. "I'll but look into his eyes and listen to his voice a moment, for thence all my strength and courage spring."

"Doubtful fountains when a man's in love," he answered. Then spoke Saurus, who had appeared behind the ruined temple, and now approached them.

"The general's here," he said.

"Post yourself by the cypress clump, my friend, for that's the way Xiphilin must come to the tryst," answered Nicephorus. "Scream like a peacock when he approaches, and the sound will dismiss Romanus and summon me."

They departed then, Nicephorus towards the vineyards and the Lizard in an opposite direction. Even as they did so, there broke a great, ragged figure from the oleanders and Eudocia leapt to his arms. Behind the low shrubs and broken marble they were hidden.

"My life, as a beggar man I come," he said.

"Dear pagan treasure! Oh, Romanus, why can we never meet but one of us is mumming? First it was I, as a cup bearer, and now my joy is stained

like a peasant, and his limbs hung with horrid tatters. Let me wash your face and dry it with my handkerchief, my brown baby!"

"Nay, I must be hid a little longer yet. I have the advantage to-day, for I see you as you are. Oh, to hear that ring of heavenly bells men call your voice, Eudocia—to look upon your loveliness! But you're pale, my golden bird."

"Only with happiness. How did you fare? Did the guards note you?"

"Indeed they did, cursed me for a cur, and bade me join the army like a man, not pull grapes like a woman. I growled an oath at the brave lads and slunk away from them."

"If they had known that under that ragged coat beat the heart they love!" she cried. "There's sad unrest amid your Varangian men—they who call themselves English. Alas! they hate my name."

"They'll bless it soon. They set me high, but not as high as I set them, my dearest treasure. They are a people unlike others, and have that the rest of savages lack. Where, in its fog and nakedness, lies the far off, desert isle that spills them into civilisation, I know not; but this I know: they have a trick to fight with such a leaven of mirth in their fury that the world fears them. They kill laughing,

and laughing die. Their quality terrifies and maddens common men. Michael's heavenly host never took such a joy of battle as these."

Eudocia put her hands on his shoulders and looked into his face.

"If all goes ill," she said, "you shall be free to-morrow to join them and fight for Psellus and Xiphilin against me."

"My life! What thoughts! Nought can go ill. Nicephorus, so the Lizard tells me, reasons with the Patriarch in this hour."

"He does. The sweet air will reek with lies. This image of Bacchus will tremble before such falsity. The wholesome grass will be parched for a breath of truth. Oh, Romanus, it is not the least of Eudocia's griefs, that even the happiest future she can dream must be built on falsehood, founded upon fraud. Yet so only can Nicephorus triumph."

"Trust Heaven, paragon of women," he answered. "Trust Heaven to order all things rightly. Life is a mystery, and only mental weaklings make too deep and curious search into the springs of action. When a lily opens her white chalice, do the honey bees who sing there and gather her sweet provender, dazed with the scent and lustre of her glory, stop to think the lovely thing is eating ugly

food under the earth? God is a conjuror, and from our human weakness and necessity can bring forth noble and gracious actions. All tragedy, my Queen, is based on blind-eyed error, human limitations; and the heavenly need for faulty man to suffer sorrow, grief and wrong.

“Yet, out of his torments and the far-off crimes of mighty agonists, we pluck the divine flower of art, whose tonic beauty lifts our souls to courage and endurance; heals, fortifies and teaches us to face our own little lives and make them greater.”

His arms were round her, her head upon his ragged breast.

“Ah!” she said, “within this circle the world looks different to my eyes and unfriendly fortune shrinks away. I am brave again, Romanus; but it chills my spirit, boy, that we must be so beholden to another—older and wiser than we. I had loved to think that you and I—we two—were strong enough to beard a thousand Xiphilins.”

“We are,” he answered. “And so he’ll find us. If Nicephorus fails in comedy, as well he may with that iron-fronted, solemn soul, then with tragedy we will tempt our star—aye, Eudocia, and act a tale for the poets to embalm, when we have lived it out to the glorious dregs! Your throne is greater

far than my love for it; your crown shall never touch another head while I am on earth."

"Great lover! My own! Romanus, you are dearer than any crown to me. You are my crown. And I am blessed and happy at least in this: that love and honour point one way for both of us. I would give my life for my people, and will do so when they demand it; I would hide for ever behind convent walls for them if duty called me there; but no shadow beckons that way, for well I know the State would live again if you were Emperor."

"The people would be no enemies to me if I were beside your throne."

"They should not, but they might," she answered. "For Xiphilin to them is the mouthpiece of the Eternal. Therefore it comes back to him. If he thundered against you in the name of righteousness, they would echo him, and curse you, and call God's wrath upon me for loving you."

"Do not fear the people," he urged. "It is a people's way before all else to ask a sign. They reverence deeds and welcome the appeal to their seven senses. Soldiers have taught me that. Action they account better than windy threats of power unseen. The free man is no more superstitious than the ox or ass. If you would banish from this

nation the poisoned terrors that your hierophants are skilled to plant in its heart, exhibit stirring deeds and doughty men who do not fear liberty. Once, Eudocia, when a pagan legion dreaded the foe, they erected an altar to their heathen gods, then walked round it, whimpering like a pack of frightened girls. Thereon I challenged them and destroyed their altar and spat upon it. They stood in the extremity of panic terror, and were tempted to cast down their arms and fly. But, seeing that no almighty hand struck me to death for impiety, they took heart, cried out that their god was dead, found they must trust their own might, and so swept to battle like a hurricane, and conquered. But plague upon me to waste our time with war. Come one little moment—here, close upon my knee and let me hear all the East tell me she loves me."

He sat upon a fallen pillar with the Empress in his arms.

"Love you! Where's the human word can voice a tiny part of all I hold for you, Romanus? It would task a mightier speech than mine. Only Nature could echo all you have kindled in one small heart. Her wordless speech will best tell it. Listen to the sea kissing your stormy cage on Marmora; to the deep and gentle thunder that melts along the

mountains tenderly on feverish nights, and the wind whispering at your casement, and the angel of the rain. Their unfettered voices can tell my love better than I."

"The music of all these things shall be multiplied a millionfold in sweetness since you have named them. Henceforth they will mean your lips, my Queen!"

"You speak of deeds," she said. "And for that I most adore you. The purpose should—"

From the distance came the harsh shriek of a peacock.

"The cruel signal comes!" he murmured.

"I always hated peacocks, and now they shall be birds of ill-omen. Say it was not Saurus, but some real feathered wretch who cried."

Again the hidden dwarf uttered his warning, and Eudocia rose.

"Tell me that you are happier before I go," he begged.

"Happier far," she assured him. "Happier than I have been for many a cloudy day, Romanus. Happier for knowing that neither you nor I desert the Throne. We will be faithful. Let me steal a tiny way beside you for good fortune."

"But a short distance, my blessed flower. My

hiding place is too thorny for your delicate petals. I lie where this streamlet empties to the sea, and after dark the Lizard brings a boat to row me back to red Malthus. He will endure some evil hours until I'm safe again."

They crept beyond the ruin, and a moment later there appeared two deacons and a cross-bearer, who walked before the Patriarch. At the same moment Nicephorus approached from the direction of the vineyards, whence still arose the sound of many voices, and the snatches of folk song.

§ 4

Thus met the man in black and the man in white.

At a signal his cross-bearer and deacons withdrew, and Xiphilin turned to the familiar figure. He was bent upon some understanding, and designed to thrust the statesman into a position from which he could make no escape without an expression of his opinions. Now, however, the Patriarch's own diplomacy was blocked, and he found himself moving over new and uneven ground. He designed to attack; instead he was soon upon the defensive.

"Speak your whole mind in open ears," said Nicephorus. "I desire nothing better than an

understanding, and would wish, despite the past, to think that we shared at least one ambition : to serve the State."

"I am a man to whom guile and stealth are anathema," answered Xiphilin. "I offer no excuse for what I strove to do, believing that your time of usefulness was ended, and that our situation demanded your removal."

"You pleaded eloquently and mercifully. Believe me I did not miss the spirit of your appeal. I bear you no grudge, knowing that more went to my fall than you could guess."

"Let all that be forgotten," replied the Patriarch. "You are again at Court by Eudocia's goodwill ; and think not I regret the fact. The past is past, and we are to understand that you return as friend, not counsellor. But can one steeped in diplomacy and used to command, stand by indifferent at such times as these? You know our purpose, yet not the Cæsar, nor the Senate, nor Psellus can win from you either commendation or censure. Therefore I entreat of you to speak with me plainly. Can you honestly declare that the thing we presently shall do is not directed to the welfare, nay, the salvation of the Empire? We fear you not, Nicephorus, for no human power can stay the stroke

now to fall. But must we think that your judgment disapproves our plan?"

"To set an Emperor upon the Throne?"

"Even so. This revolution has Heaven's sanction; indeed I affirm that it is inspired of Heaven. But we are reasonable men and invite you, while yet there is time, to walk our way, that your own way, after these events, shall remain open to you."

Nicephorus did not answer immediately, and when he did, ignored the threat.

"In the vanished past, Xiphilin, I often wished that you and I might work as one," he said. "I recognised your surpassing abilities as a youth, and when you chose the Church, and in swift time reached supremacy, I believed that with you at the helm of the people's spirit, we statesmen might work the needed miracle. But now I do not trust you."

"Wherefore should you refuse to trust?" asked the Patriarch. "I grant that I was glad to see your downfall, for reasons deeper than politics. It was natural, and since you speak plainly, I will do the like. I have too often perceived you exercise a malign influence against the Church, and when you say that we might have worked together, it is for me to distrust, not you. You never strengthened

my hands, but would have weakened them if you could."

"We have both erred by temperament and disposition," answered the elder. "I take your blame; but the future is now our concern, and wide-eyed, all-seeing, let us weigh its import and its hope and fear. I speak as one withdrawn from any hand or voice in affairs. I was resigned and reconciled to a life of peace. My hair does not yet hide the tonsure, to which without a murmur I submitted. I had indeed said farewell to statecraft, and was turning to what better fits old age. Yea, believe me, I should now be reclining upon philosophy, as a sick man upon his pillows. So I saw an autumn time to grow mellow ere the plucking. Thereupon, our Eudocia, learning that her fate was sealed, cried out for me, hoping doubtless to strike from my old brain some flash of aid against her deposition. But things will happen as they must, Patriarch. The warp and woof are blending swiftly, inexorably, to show what pattern her future takes —while you direct the weavers."

"Not I, Nicephorus. We are at best blind artificers. It is the Master Weaver of all looms who sets the pattern."

Nicephorus pointed to Eudocia's little silver throne by which they now stood.

"Rest you here awhile and I will make confession to your Beatitude," he said. "Not on my knees—alas! they are too old to bend easily, but from my heart."

"It is the throne of the Empress."

"An augury! Sit, man! This senseless toy cannot proclaim you impious. Be seated, and I will recline upon the cushions."

Xiphilin, weary of standing, obeyed, but his black eyes searched the trees.

"I'll strike to the root and voice my inner dreams, knowing the secret safe with you," continued Nicephorus. "It is agreed that the sceptre of the East has grown too heavy for any woman's hand."

"If you grant so much, what divides us?"

"Humanity," answered the statesman. "Plain humanity first, diplomacy afterwards. I love our gracious Monarch. She is a woman of noble nature—sunk just now from her lofty ideals by two tormentors—love and despair. But I am not blind. Her last hope is centred in the people's will. 'Let me be at the mercy of my people'—thus she prays."

"A woman's wish," answered Xiphilin. "The

people have no mercy. None will show one spark of ruth when the appointed hour strikes. She is angering her people at this moment. Why does Romanus Diogenes still lie chained by Marmora? For female spite and folly. His troops debauch the capital, and if we had delayed much longer, it is not we but the Varangians and Romanus who had wrecked her throne. I speak assuming that he still lives."

"Supposing the general free, wherein would lie your hopes?" asked Nicephorus. "Can it be that they chime with my own?"

"I think thus," replied the Patriarch. "Our watchwords should be 'policy' and 'oppression.' At the centre power absolute—a power rich in all resources, prompt in all actions; a brain whose thoughts, echoed by a thousand willing ministers, can flash to the confines of empire quicklier than the thunderbolt; a mouth whose slightest whisper awakes the sleeping sword or puts it up again. Our ramparts should be built, not of dead earth and stone, Nicephorus, but palpitating flesh and blood fired by a nation's spirit. Power should be conserved jealously, and handed only from the strong to the strong. Power in the hands of the weak means death to all. It is summed in that word,

power to protect and punish, power to threaten and breed fear, power welling from the nation's heart to her boundaries—power—ever more power I crave!"

"You do yourself a wrong to say you are no statesman," answered Nicephorus. "Had politics tempted your genius, yours the mouth and brain ere this that held the saving word, the pregnant thought, the whirlwind on its leash. The army, then, you hold our foremost problem."

"Power, more power—bred out of pure patriotism first, and then pure intellect to govern and apply it."

"We have the intellect, but patriotism is a rare flower—so many weeds masquerade in her name."

"No great nation wholly lacks it," argued Xiphilin. "The germ abides in Greece, and if the mighty ones but light their beacons on our mountain tops, the lesser flames will flash their answer till all the nation's in a blaze. Let it be our task to kindle such a flame; and that we may do so, a man is needed on the Throne."

"Weighty and worthy words," declared Nicephorus. "I bow to them. A great man we need, to light the Empire's heart and to teach the people what a woman cannot teach them. To-day we buy

our soldiers in open market, as cooks their kids and porkers, chaffering to get them cheaply. We give our gold for the living carcases of Sclav and renegade Turk, Bulgar and Englishman, to fight for our skins. Yet how can these love alien soil, or erect that barrier of a nation's spirit sprung unconquerable from its own mother's sons? Hired spears never fight to a finish—unless, indeed, one they love leads them."

"Even so," grunted Xiphilin. "A queen cannot take the field; John Ducas can."

"John Ducas! Poor Cæsar! Would you send him to the wars fretting his fat in fear and shivering under mountain tents hardened by frost? He was not born to make the soldiers love him. Think again, Patriarch. My heart! How oft I mourn that it is forbidden our Empress should wed a hero."

"I do not crave another hero in the purple," replied Xiphilin. "Byzantium has seen enough of heroes; they put too heavy a strain on the State. Let the heroes strut the field and be as terrible there as you will. In time of peace there is no greater or more dangerous nuisance than your hero. Our ultimate ideals are never those of fighting men, and the land that lets the blade turn against the

wit that forged it, fares ill. As for her—Eudocia—she has sworn away any thought of a second spouse. If fifty right heroes came in chariots of thunder from the sky, she never weds again—not while God reigns in heaven and I stand for Him on earth."

"I wish most heartily you did so stand," retorted Nicephorus.

"And do I not?"

"No, Patriarch. I'm glad you put the question, however. It will help us forward. You and I have never fairly grasped each other's problems nor have we measured each other's strength. I often considered your self-denials and abnegations, but give you large credit I could not, because I saw that these trials were forced upon you and your gigantic ambitions were fettered. So the lesser thing commands what your heart tells you is the greater, and you accept the fact that in the East our politics come first, our religion second. Even thus we stand, and you are a servant, but not to God only. Soon now you must bend under the will of the translated Cæsar and the mercy of Michael Psellus. Holy Church at the beck of the historian! That is why I shake my head and deny you the power that you pretend."

"'Pretend,' Nicephorus?"

“Pretend you must, Patriarch. Reality is denied you, for only the shadow of power is yours. Your loftiest claims fall far short of real power, and who knows it better than yourself? A ghost and faint simulacrum your rule appears when we contrast it with any potent Prince of the Church. The Cardinals in Rome are greater men than you. You stand unto their substance as a shadow beside the ponderable thing that flings it. The Church of Rome is a scourge of many thongs; ours—what? A slave, to feel the lash, not wield the lash.”

“To my everlasting shame I grant you speak the truth,” admitted the Primate, with troubled forehead and fierce eyes.

“The shame does not lie with you—unless, indeed, you are content,” answered Nicephorus.

“Content!” I am not made of stuff that can be moulded to content.”

“No, you are not. Life, doubtless, disturbs you and you mourn the vision of what should be, opposed to what is. But shall your pitiful pretence and mummary flourish to the end of time because the Constitution of this realm has emasculated our Church?”

In Xiphilin’s soul awoke suspicion of this tempting tongue.

"Not so you talked upon your trial," he said.

"Not so I thought upon my trial," answered the other. "Many and magical things have happened since my trial—things that you might have marked as swiftly as I, yet failed to do so. I will come to them. Let us pursue first this tremendous theme. I am confessing, remember, and I ask myself, in the light of a great and immediate possibility, what irrevocable fate still holds our Church in its ancient bonds, to limp, a prisoner, at the chariot wheels of temporal power? Why, for an example, should the Roman See outshine ours of the East as a risen moon beggars the stars? Tell me what virtue lies in popes, that Christian monarchs tumble over each other to kiss their omnipotent toes? I only ask to learn. Why is the West so quick to grant the Almighty's first minister his pride of place and amplitude of power, while the Orient denies it to him, and cynically curbs his sacred claims? Is it right, or wrong? Is it the highest wisdom, or a gross impiety? Might not some devout souls say that we come near to flouting Heaven's self when we flout Heaven's vicegerent? Indeed I doubt not there are men we know would declare that it is for this offence we suffer the pangs of failure, tribulation and defeat on many fields.

Thus might they say God wills to open our blinded eyes, by humbling our might again and again before the infidel."

"Believe, I have bitterly felt all that you speak," answered the Patriarch. "I have smarted under it, writhed under it and taken my tortures with many a groan and prayer before the Everlasting. The Pope and I are equal touching the Light we profess to hold aloft; but the difference between us lies in this: he of the triple crown is a traitor to God, and by blackest treachery arrogates temporal power, cleaving to it with devilish cunning, and so prostituting the message of the Most High. In the spirit of the Devil he utters his threats and promises. He reigns by terror over friends and foes alike; his statecraft extends over the souls of men, and out of their superstitious dread of the hereafter, they grovel in the present. His power rises out of man's ignorance, not God's wisdom, and the West was ever fertile soil to spawn his proud and vast authority. But the East still feels a questioning spirit—a spirit bred by pagan men before the dawn of Christ. What they wrote and taught still bears doubtful fruit of reason, and it is through the golden and temperate mean, between reason and faith, that I would lead mankind,

Nicephorus. If I could shout and bellow half as loud as impious Rome, I should be heard as far; but I am a Christian, in truth as well as name; the Pope is not. The outside of his cup may be bright; the inside is foul. Yet who shall deny the better part is mine: to yield the earthly power for spiritual?"

But the elder shook his head.

"That will not do," he answered. "You make a virtue out of your impotence, neither deceiving me nor satisfying Xiphilin. Your path upward, into the splendour of historic fame, would run by wider channels if you had the strength to make it. These surely are times when heavenly claims cry for earthly genius to keep them in the forefront of our affairs, lest they recede and are for ever lost. These are times when Christ's humility—always beautiful—may prove perilous to His Church. He brought a sword, knowing the need thereof. Yet you suffer it to lie rusting in the scabbard. Does not your own office show that I speak truth? At a nod—an Emperor's nod—a monk has often passed from the cell to St. Sophia's throne; and thence again—to nothing. But our patriarchs should be sacred once they reach supremacy. The fault is their own, however, since they deem the sword

becomes them less fittingly than a shirt of hair. Remember, Xiphilin, that your Maker willed you to be a patrician first, a priest afterwards; and God does nothing without purpose."

The Patriarch was perturbed. He drummed upon the arm of the little throne and stared darkly at his companion.

"Are you an angel to counsel, or a devil to tempt?" he asked.

"Neither. An old man who only yearns to see this State assured ere he leaves it for the peace of his grave—the State stronger and the throne secure."

"A woman reigns," said Xiphilin, "and at her wilful whim stands the plenipotentiary of the Almighty."

"A thorn to prick any high priest," admitted Nicephorus. "But are you not a Christian first and a subject afterwards? Now is your hour, your opportunity! Time dawdles for you! Be another Photius, man, and set the Pope and all his works under your heel!"

"Then must the Eastern Crown be under my heel also," answered Xiphilin, looking upon the fires of the sunset sky.

"That, too, and why not? Our Christian Asia,

our Christian Africa, and all the Islands go peacefully enough at your command, then why not Constantinople?"

"You ask mighty but idle questions. Only time to come can see them answered," replied the other with a sigh.

"Answer them yourself. Make Time your accomplice, not your enemy, Patriarch. Use this ripe and teeming hour, for never yet was one strong hand in reach of such fruit ready to fall."

"You dream, Nicephorus. These blessings cannot come for this generation. It is the soldier's hour, not ours. While on every frontier there howls a different foe, the Church can only watch and pray."

"And would our armies not fight for Holy Church as they have never fought before? I say: 'Secure the temporal power, and all the weightier things will be added to you.' Ascend the Throne, Xiphilin! Reign by proxy, and from that exalted place your vision will indeed scan reality; your hand pour down spiritual food upon the realm, as manna from the clouds. You seize the less for the sake of the greater, answering first the cry of the Nation's stricken body that you may anon heal her soul."

Xiphilin breathed deep and his nostrils opened widely as he respiration; but his forehead was moody; his eyes shifted to right and left, like those of a nervous horse.

“What has inspired your thoughts to this stupendous vision?” he asked. “The desire of my downfall, perchance? You would egg me on to work time’s revenges for you? I cannot forget that you ever scoffed at the verities, Nicephorus.”

“Not I,” answered the other. “You wrong me there; and you wrong me to suppose that I dream of revenge. Look back and see when I have sought revenge on any man. Religion undefiled won no flout or scorn from me; but to watch the soul choked out of righteousness with idle pomp——”

“Religion appreciates the value of the eye, the ear, the nose. Men may be drawn by these to holiness, for all have eyes, ears, noses; few possess understanding.”

“You ask whence come these deep and pregnant thoughts, Patriarch. Believe me, loyalty, not treason, breeds them. Our Eudocia must wed.”

He waited for the explosion, and it came.

“That she shall never do. Her eternal widowhood is as sure as that the sun is setting. The world united does not shake my determination. It

is for this reason that the Throne passes to Cæsar, since our cry is for an Emperor."

"That's her cry, too."

"Then I pray wisdom is whispering her to abdicate, that our course may be the peacefuller."

"Wisdom," said Nicephorus, "has whispered her to share the Throne, not leave it. Nature knows no obligations, recognises no oath. Providence has willed that the Empress loves."

"Do not take the name of Providence in vain, old man. It is the Devil, not Providence, who has breathed this appalling impiety into her wanton heart."

"I feared that you would think so; yet I much mourn your attitude. It is a disaster for the Church, and therefore a universal tragedy."

"The Church is not involved save to do right," answered Xiphilin, but the counsellor explained himself.

"Directly, vitally, fatally involved. So deeply that, in this emotion of the Monarch, I repeat the hand of Providence alone is lifted—both for Church and State."

Again Xiphilin deeply doubted; again he became personal.

"You are not used to talk so dangerously, or

show your spirit naked. Can accident and change and chance and unexpected things unveil you thus?"

"A natural wonder. Yet it is so, Xiphilin. For consider the significance of my first discovery on return to Court. I came and found the Empress had lifted the Protostrator to her right hand, had wakened to see him in a roseal light that, between man and woman, means one thing alone."

"Bardas!" cried Xiphilin. "That gilded piece of emptiness!"

"Empty vessels can be filled; he is your brother; and though he bears himself proudly, it is first because he is your brother that he does so. He shows at least a very seemly reverence for you, and is under your authority more than your little finger. In truth you are your brother's keeper, for good or ill; and did he reign, then you and only you are monarch of the East—to control Church, State, all. Did fate but set you on that Olympian perch, my friend, I think your thunder would reach as far, your lightning strike as sharp, as any pope's. We old men dream dreams and see visions. I—in your ear as penitent—confess that I have dreamed how an oath, made to a dying man, might well be an-

nulled—to no base purpose, but for the salvation of a distraught kingdom. To me, in this waking dream, it seemed incredibly strange that such a trifle should thrust between a nation's hope and despair. My vision showed how easily our helm might be safe in a steadfast hand, our sails sure set at last before the steady breath of Heaven's will; while forward, to her appointed destiny, our ship stood out upon the obsequious deep. But you must pardon me these images, for, as you teach me, I am too backward in matters of the spirit."

Xiphilin's black eyes stared before him, probing the future. His brain worked; for a moment suspicion grew dull.

"Answer this," he said. "Does Diogenes still live?"

"I have her word he does. She knows the passionate adoration of the armies for his name."

"Speak on then, Nicephorus. Bare the depth of your amazing thought. It will go no farther."

"Mayhap I have spoken too much already, Patriarch. But within your pontifical heart this secret is safe enough. I have confessed; it is for you to absolve and forget."

"You are a statesman," answered Xiphilin, "and

your prescience in policy needs no condemnation or censure from me, since the thought behind is pure and the devotion to State transparent."

"You speak the truth and judge me fairly," answered the elder. "It is not only for you that I have laid my ambition bare. Grant at least, whether you will to wield it or no, that this weapon appears one of heavenly forging, well tempered for such a tremendous test."

"What weapon?" asked Xiphilin.

"Why, her heart—the heart of Eudocia, now afire under the unanswerable, unreasoning goad of love. There is one soul on all the earth she might espouse, to your enormous gain, Patriarch, as Father of the Church. And were that granted, as swiftly as her love and our policy might accomplish it. . . . But I am weary; I talk in vain. You will not make the answer that my heart had hoped to hear from yours; so mine grows cold."

The Patriarch did not reply immediately: he was pursuing his own reflections.

"What trashy baits will take them!" he said at length, looking up at Nicephorus, who had risen, and now stood beside him. "Nevertheless there is inconsistency in this woman. I cannot think that she would lose her old, unconcealed contempt of Bardas at a breath."

“Warn him; warn him of his peril. Bid him begone swiftly. A whisper from you will despatch him. At a wink he’ll fly to the ends of the earth. Only passion has tempted him thus far. Yet I blame him not, for who under such direct provocation could have held in?”

“Strange is the sound of the still, small voice in a human ear,” mused Xiphilin. “So doubtfully indeed sometimes it whispers, that even those best in tune to receive the message may err.”

“But not always so,” answered the other. “None can speak so clear as conscience when clearness is demanded. Now my cry is for an expert of the oracles to tell this dream of mine and spell its meaning. And who better than you should read it?”

“You hold that she actually loves him?” asked Xiphilin.

“Watch them together and judge. That will be easy.”

“It is not in her character so to do,” declared the Patriarch. “Never have her taste and inclination sought the things that Bardas lives for.”

“Such was my opinion also. And still I think it,” answered Nicephorus. “They differ profoundly; and that is massive evidence in itself, for Love takes joy to play these magic sleights and

involve by his indecent wit right opposite men and women who, but for his mad games, would be the first to feel and see their own deep disparity. Love will link such together, while fools laugh and wise men take shame."

"How did he dare to fly so high, think you?"

"Would he have dared without some huge inspiration to exalt his spirit and make him fearless? And the Empress—would she suddenly view him in this new light did no fire drip from love's torch into her soul? Your brother Bardas is not the first to be an Emperor, who loved his horse and hound. When I was caged by Marmora I played at chess with him and often thought how destiny has willed to crown a pawn, yet little guessed that I should live to see the thing happen. And can we now deny that the reason for this wonder rests within the sleepless mind of an over-ruling Providence? You are still the vane to mark which way the wind of Heaven is blowing on this people. Then mark it now for me."

Xiphilin, thrown into agitation, took some steps and walked irresolutely up and down, while Nicephorus stood still and watched him. Then the priest spoke again:

"What would be the issue if such a revolution

burst upon this slumbering State? And what is your personal hope out of this, did it, indeed, happen? You must have considered the situation as it touched yourself."

"I have not looked as far as that. Had I done so, I had probably been silent, for fear. I was only desirous to reveal what seemed an evangel of great worth, and bring it to you in all its splendour, danger and significance, that your impartial mind might resolve whether it comes from Evil or Good?"

Xiphilin weighed these words; then he began to nibble the bait with infinite circumspection. He sat again and expounded the situation with a sophistry that was his second nature in matters of the soul.

Slowly and surely he began to deceive—not his listener, but himself.

"The doubt lies with the dead," declared he, his brows bent in a double task: to display the case luminously and to bend the argument in the direction of his gathering conviction. "If Constantine was wholly conscious when he exacted Eudocia's oath, then not I, nor angels, nor archangels could rescind so irrevocable a bond. But if we were in a position to say that the Emperor had already

turned into the vestibule of death, that his hold on consciousness was weakened before Eudocia swore——”

“Why, then, indeed, no doubt could exist,” replied Nicephorus. “The point must ever remain obscure to mortal mind. But we cannot in honesty ignore the doubt. The doubt itself is the point; for grant the uncertainty of Constantine’s condition at the fatal moment, then the case is largely altered, and it becomes a question for you and you only, whether the benefit of the doubt may not be conceded. Your problem is not complex and reduces itself to this: whether—not for her own sake, but for the mightier issues now before you—to the Empress shall be given the benefit of doubt.”

Xiphilin nodded, but scarcely heard. He was pursuing his natural way through the labyrinth.

“If often happens that a man will reveal a master passion at some moment great with his own destiny,” he said.

Nicephorus regarded him; but the old man’s face revealed no tremor, nor was there a breath of irony in his voice as he answered:

“Most true, Patriarch; I have seen it with these eyes!”

“The late Emperor’s was jealousy,” continued

Xiphilin. "Of that there can be no question. A young wife will often waken it in an old husband, though she may be innocent. Many a time I warned our Constantine against this futile emotion. But since that was so, we may go a careful step farther and grant that, even were he in possession of his full faculties, the motive that inspired the oath he put upon Eudocia came not from Heaven. You follow me? Jealousy—strongest in his weakest hour—wholly dominated Constantine's sinking mind; and thus, whether fully conscious or no, he erred. I will not actually affirm that he did wrong, Nicephorus. He may mentally have passed the point at which wrongdoing can be imputed to him; but err the late king did and, either way, it leaves the Church free enough."

"A potent argument," admitted the other.

"Let us now consider what follows," continued the priest. "Eudocia's young; she might in course of nature bear a son and blot the dynasty of Ducas out!"

The veteran knew that his battle was won. There remained only to gather the trophies. He relaxed and began to paint with a coarse brush.

"Well may you ask what follows! Your own

blood flows into the purple and you found a dynasty yourself! It staggers an old brain to think that such deeds lie within the stroke of one man's hand. And such a man."

"I must pursue this tremendous subject on my knees," answered the younger. He was wiping his brow whereon his emotion beaded. His breath had quickened — he almost panted. Nicephorus perceived in him phenomena akin to those exhibited by Bardas in prison.

Xiphilin continued :

"I'll hide myself in some lonely House of God. I will withdraw and listen whether the Voice that guides my least and greatest thought speaks clearly."

But delay did not commend itself to the statesman.

"Is not your soul already upon its knees?" he enquired wearily. For he was skilled to keep triumph out of his face and speech as easily as failure. "Be assured, Patriarch, that the still, small voice you tell me guides your every deed, now speaks loud enough and assures you that the noblest form of prayer is action. When the trumpet sounds from the clouds, our spirits leap to answer, for that celestial summons may not come

twice. Heaven bids to her banquets when they are ready and offers fruit ripe for instant plucking. Things happen at God's good time, or never. We must gird our armour on with despatch, for surprise is often the secret of success."

Xiphilin nodded acquiescence.

"The army first," he said. "If Psellus and the Cæsar suddenly find me cold— But neither matters much before this avalanche. The Empress alone—she and the future Emperor."

"And you."

"If she were publicly absolved of her oath, Nicephorus, and bidden, on pain of divine displeasure, to forego her hatred against Romanus Diogenes— then we are trebly armed and as safe as wit of man and will of God can make us."

"And this I promise," added the other, "that when the truth is out, Romanus and his armies will be firm for the Throne. Opposition is of no account while you hold the powers of Heaven and earth in your two hands."

"The Senate—?"

"When you have sanctified Eudocia's love, the rest must happen as the cataract falls over the precipice. We know the Senate."

Xiphilin rose to his feet.

"My Master speaks!" he said in his deepest tones.

"So be it," answered the other, quick to answer theatricals with rhetoric. "Mark the sky, Patriarch, tinged with the rapture of a sun in sight of rest. Let this gracious light gild your blessed deed and link Nature's hour of peace with your most glorious enterprise."

"She shall be free, Nicephorus, before the sun has set!"

"Amen to that," answered the old man devoutly. Then he saluted the Patriarch.

"Heroic priest! I have known some—few they were—who, by rare texture of their souls, flashed meteor-like through life, to influence the story of mankind. So come the rare comets from outer space, to cleave the skies and vanish, yet leave behind in mighty births, or other portents, a message from beyond our ken. Will that this joyous thing be broken joyously; for Constantinople is quick to take a mood of hope or fear from you. If you are dark, men falter; if you smile, they know all's well."

"Joyous it must be, since God hath sent the great news to earth," declared Xiphilin. "Cleave

to that, Nicephorus. Be very sure I glean my mandate from on high and shall so proclaim it. The thunders of thanksgiving will drown the danger."

"Cite Heaven only; but I need not counsel you."

"I will go," continued Xiphilin, "and bid my people to the shrine in St. Sophia's. Then, with a guard of Churchmen, they shall bring along the reliquary that holds her oath. Within the hour all is done."

He hastened where his little company strolled beside the vineyard hedge; and swiftly despatched them with a cipher message to the cathedral.

§ 5

Nicephorus watched the Patriarch depart, but no elation marked his countenance; indeed melancholy harboured there. He felt conscious of his immense accomplishment, yet found slight savour in the taste of it.

Walking slowly he stood by the shattered Dionysus; and then Eudocia, who had for the last few moments watched unseen, slipped from the undergrowth and stood beside him.

“Is it life or death?” she asked, and Nicephorus did not reply, though implicitly his words answered her.

He pointed to the statue.

“The boyish god, Majesty—our Dionysus of the destinies, who from Dodona leapt into the world, to wreak his will upon the hearts of men with might and madness. His cantharos has fallen with his hand to the dust, else he might have drunk to your Patriarch and the furies now sharpening their talons for a soul. In truth his mænads and corybants, streaming with blood and wine; his fauns and nymphs and old grey satyrs—the whole shrieking, crazy company—are but a fairy dance to the throng of Christian fiends and devils soon to haunt your jubilant arch-priest.”

“What has happened to him?” she asked.

“Destruction. The man’s spirit shall scorch under the white light of truth anon, and her ghastly glass reflect for him the secret of his undoing. Now he goes drugged to his awakening and he, who worshipped a greater Christ than Dionysus, falls like Lucifer.”

“Speak plainly to me, Nicephorus.”

He turned and took her hand tenderly.

“A thorn has scratched your cheek, Majesty. I pray you now be milk and honey to the Patriarch. The sun is setting on one happy man at least, and may rise upon a city full of them. The light has flashed, like a sword, into your enemy’s heart, and he is an enemy no more.”

“Then you have triumphed!” she cried.

“A tasteless triumph too. His own pride won the bout, not I, and Xiphilin was an easy prey to Xiphilin. Our lives are childish puzzles for the gods to piece and play with, Eudocia; yet man beats his Maker sometimes, if one may judge by the wagging of the world. I will seek Xiphilin’s friends now, who wait in some anxiety the issues of these interchanges. Lies cannot stand alone, Divine One. They need the comfort and support of each other. When he approaches you from yonder, salute him pensively and let him know you love. You shall hear no harsh sermon from him to-day. Indeed he brings a mighty gift for his Empress.”

“My liberty!”

The Patriarch had observed Eudocia and now came forward.

“I will not spoil his pleasure. And I pray you

to laud and honour Bardas. Breathe his august name as though it still were music," said her counsellor.

"So it is," she answered. "Indeed it should be if I owe him my fortune. But you are sad; you speak with weariness; there is no light in your eyes, Nicephorus."

"Not sad," he said, "but hungry for simple scenes, without the need of stratagems and wiles, to catch poor fellow men in snares woven from their own weakness. Much I envy the pure in heart—they who stand before the throne of Reason, intent upon her voice alone, at peace with all mankind. But I should have thought of that before I turned statesman."

He left her then and, passing the Patriarch, spoke before he went upon his way.

"I have not declared your revelation," he said. "From you alone must she learn the boon."

The Patriarch now stood by his Empress, who sat again upon her little silver throne. Excitement had faded from her eyes and she simulated melancholy. Indeed there was no great need for acting: Nicephorus had cast her down.

"Alone, Majesty?" inquired Xiphilin.

"Would that I were," she answered. "A woman's

never alone while her whole heart is full of someone else. But what know you of hearts, Patriarch?"

"I know that for any heart a throne's a lonely place."

"Why, you are like him in a way," she said, regarding the priest ingenuously. "You have his nose, Xiphilin; but there is a gentler lustre in his eyes; his forehead is not so proud as yours, and he can laugh."

Xiphilin pretended a great ignorance.

"Men of distinction like not to be compared with others, or learn of fancied resemblances," he answered, "yet, if I bring any pleasant vision to your memory, it is well. I seek audience, and here is opportunity."

"Nay," she said. "I am in no mood for hard blows to-night. I know what is in your heart, and mine is heavy enough without that added burden. My destruction comes apace and I am prepared. 'Twas your brother, Bardas, you resembled for a moment, but now no longer."

"Do you speak of the Protostrator, Majesty?"

"I would exalt him to a station more consonant with his rare gifts. Men rate Bardas too low. He has been valuable to me."

"You are the only judge," he answered. "I have some admiration for him. But in a Churchman pride of race is blameworthy. He would, however, grace advancement. Leave him now and listen. I come not to bring trouble or warning—far otherwise. I am the messenger of amazing and joyful tidings."

"There's no joy but in freedom, Patriarch."

"We both know that, Eudocia Augusta. To spirits such as ours, freedom is the air we breathe."

She showed wonder in her looks.

"Why, you are come friendly disposed! I thought you hated me and would dethrone me, because I was a woman."

"Foolish thought," he answered. "I feared for you and urged a happier, holier future than the throne can promise; but why should I hate God's anointed? Eudocia, I have, since last we met, heard mighty messages that must change my vision of the future. Your name has been spoken melodiously in my ears on sacred tongues. It has been murmured to me on immortal lips, for in Heaven's high councils you are remembered."

"Blessed news! But rather would I hear my unhappy country is not forgotten, Patriarch."

"It is not forgotten," he assured her. "The

Mind that counts the sparrows holds both this stupendous realm and its Sovereign. We are within the cognizance of the Highest; we——”

He broke off, for Bardas approached briskly from the vineyards.

“A suppliant, Majesty,” he exclaimed. “The vintagers are troubled and disconsolate. Their rites remain undone, and while the sun sets, our sun is not yet risen. The folk thirst and hunger for you to bless the day’s labour.”

But Eudocia waved him away.

“Anon, dear Bardas,” she said. “I have much to learn of your brother. He has a message——”

“Your pardon,” replied the Protostrator, with his eye on Xiphilin. “I did not know——”

But the Patriarch was sternly gracious.

“If Majesty wills, we can go together,” he declared. “What I have to tell should be welcomed by all who love the Queen; and you, Bardas, are one of them.”

“My life is hers,” answered the younger reverently.

“It is a life precious to me,” murmured Eudocia.

Then together they departed, while Xiphilin revealed how in a vision he had learned that Eudocia’s oath must be annulled.

“Godless men still dare maintain that the days of miracles are passed,” he said. “But you shall hear——”

They passed into the vines and a mighty shout greeted Eudocia’s advent to pluck the royal bunches of custom.

§ 6

Elsewhere Psellus and the Cæsar walked together and awaited Xiphilin. But the priest came not and, instead, there presently appeared Nicephorus. They saw him mark them, then approach.

“Fortune is kind,” he declared, as he greeted them; “above all men I seek you twain. Black news is up on bitter wings, Cæsar.”

“At last then, Nicephorus, you are at the trouble to discriminate between good and bad, and remain no longer indifferent.”

Psellus spoke.

“We know of no black news,” he added. “Perchance the blackness lies in your own mind. You will not tell us that the Patriarch shares your concern?”

“No, we see differently,” admitted Nicephorus.

“Take it, then, that we stand with him, not you.”

“‘With him,’ Michael Psellus! Know you whither he is going, what doing? Such a man laughs at strategy and wastes no words upon the weak. ‘With him,’ you say? And does the Cæsar echo that? His purpose——”

“We know it and all the world knows it. John Ducas mounts the throne,” answered Psellus.

“Then you are hoodwinked also, Michael—you, who thought that you could read to the heart and pierce all disguises. This dethroning of the Monarch is but a stalking-horse, the feint under cover of which Xiphilin pushes his real forces to the battle.”

“What do you mean, Nicephorus?” asked the Cæsar in bewilderment.

“I mean the dynasty! Attend, while there is time, if indeed there be time left you. Your treachery—to dethrone Eudocia—he smiled upon as we smile upon the chatter of children. Have you of late marked the Empress and Xiphilin’s brother?”

“Her eyes are much on him,” admitted John Ducas.

“Her secret thoughts also. Can you not see whereto this leads? Let but Bardas ascend the throne and Xiphilin is omnipotent.”

“Her oath makes that fancy vain. He has hoodwinked you, not us, if he pretends any such thing,” declared Psellus.

“Her oath lies in his hand; and knowing that Bardas courts her, he has absolved her of her oath. Within this living hour she shall be free to wed again!”

“We met his people,” said the Cæsar.

“Yes—hastening for the parchment. Ere you sleep, the oath’s annulled.”

Psellus regarded the old man with deep suspicion.

“How stand you to this monstrous dream?” he asked, and as he did so, faint music stole from the vineyards.

“Thus I stand,” replied Nicephorus calmly. “Rather than she should wed a Bardas, I’d see her in her coffin. Others can plot as well as you, Michaél Psellus, and go deeper far.”

“This, if the truth, is a stroke against our blood—aimed at our very race,” exclaimed the Cæsar in trepidation. “Did this happen, my brother’s son would never see the throne. We must smite while the power is ours.”

“Are you with us, or against us?” asked Psellus.

“With you, so long as you will that this shall not

be," answered Nicephorus. "Trust me and I can enlighten you; doubt me and I proceed alone. But know that I stand absolutely for the Empress against all who would oppose her."

"She would do this foul thing to keep her throne," declared Psellus. "No less an ambition could sink her to Bardas. It is an infamy against the royal dead."

"Blame her not, however, since you know nothing. How should you judge what mighty forces are working upon her heart?" replied Nicephorus.

"Take it that I trust you, and command you to aid me for the dynasty," urged John Ducas.

"Trust him or not, we may trust Romanus," declared the Prime Minister. "Diogenes is now our hope. Let him be free and we swiftly turn the tables on the Church."

"An inspiration that I willingly acclaim," admitted Nicephorus. "You hit the truth, Michael. The key lies with Diogenes; and that key I hold."

The music grew louder, flung into the red air of evening by rough voices and rough instruments.

"His time has come," continued Nicephorus. "Count on me for the general. Meanwhile keep

cheerful faces now, and show no more than deep astonishment when he voices his message. But hide your hearts and waste no anger. Question him, as you design to do, concerning me, and he'll say that I am wise and worthy of trust. He will expect opposition, but offer him none. Restraine yourselves and let him not guess that we have spoken. We'll meet when the world slumbers. Pray seek me after midnight at my house."

He went his way, and scarcely had disappeared, when the procession from the vineyards streamed into their view.

Psellus and the Caesar spoke hurriedly together.

"Can this be true?" asked John Ducas, and the other answered that he believed it.

"To what end should Nicephorus have spoken if it were false?" he responded. "Only a Xiphilin could have conceived such gigantic crime."

"Shall we be safe with Nicephorus?"

"Yes, if we oppose the Patriarch. Meanwhile our own great purpose lies in the dust. This means blood, and the first sword out will shed it. Romanus must be freed. Nicephorus declares Diogenes in his power, and if that be so, to-morrow will prove the truth of it. In this shuffle we must,

for the present time at least, side with Nicephorus against Xiphilin, even though we pretend to let the Patriarch convince us."

"He has forced this thing upon Eudocia," said John Ducas; but the other denied it.

"Look at them," he replied. "See how she walks between Xiphilin and Bardas, and smiles upon both. Is that joy unreal?"

Now came the Court, to rustic music played on pipes and cymbals. Eudocia led the way with the priest and his brother, while behind them followed the women, the senators and a brilliant throng from the vineyards. Michael Ducas, with Theodora and Gregoria, laboured along under mighty bunches of fruit; then marched the soldiers to the spears they had left stuck in the ground around the glade, and resumed their stations. There followed the vintagers with laden hock carts. Mounds of green and purple fruit were piled upon the wains, and mighty, mouse-coloured bullocks, with gilded horns and melting eyes, drew them. The throng of country men, women, and children assembled before Eudocia; then their music changed, and the folk sang an ancient vintage song, relic of pagan days.

"THE VINTAGE SONG

"Bless ye the bud and pour the pearly dew;
 Fling forth a joy of green once more;
 Awake the glory that anew
 Leaps in a living fire along our trellised shore.

* Ah—yee Theeoneesee!

Ah—yee Theeoneesee!

"Bless ye the fragrant blossoms when they break
 Like foam upon the leafy flood;
 Where honey bees their pleasure take
 Before the nectar mounts to make the berries' blood.

Ah—yee Theeoneesee!

Ah—yee Theeoneesee!

"Bless ye the swelling grape and load the bough
 With purple and with amber bright;
 The while we praise and lift our vow,
 Kiss earth with all our knees and own they godhead's
 might.

Ah—yee Theeoneesee!

Ah—yee Theeoneesee!"

Others had joined the company while the song was a-singing, for Xiphilin's deacons returned, his cross-bearer and acolyte stood beside him, and there had also come from the cathedral a throng of priests in black and purple, and russet-clad monks. They brought a casket of gold and a small tripod whereon now fire was made. Bardas stood beside Eudocia; Psellus and the Cæsar were together in converse with the Patriarch. The Court, aware

* Αγιε Διονύσιε (phonetically sung).

that some unexpected matter was forward, grew intent, clustering like bees about the throne. The vintagers now waited for their expected dole, but the bronze coffer that bore it was not yet to be opened.

Xiphilin stood forth to address rich and poor with melodious flow of words, while the sunset made more brilliant a concourse already splendid as a pride of peacocks.

“It is fitting,” cried the Patriarch, “that you who have now celebrated our joyous rite of God’s good harvest, should hear my weighty words—noble and simple alike—ere home you go, your duty done and your pleasure taken. For I have joyful tidings and wondrous news, that shall echo like heavenly music in all loyal ears. Let it be blazed abroad, to glad our friends and terrify our foes, that I, the humble servant of you all, the willing mediator between His faithful ones and most high God, have seen in a vision an angel from the realms of Light and heard, out of his celestial lips, the will of our everlasting Father.

“Heaven, ye people, hath willed that Eudocia Augusta shall be free. Her realm demands an earthly King to share the throne, and the King of

Kings, for love of us all, directs that her oath to Constantine, of glorious memory, be cancelled!"

Those who apprehended the tremendous significance of this utterance held their breath in amazement or consternation, while the peasants, hardly understanding, stared in wonder upon the thrilled company from the palace. Through the emotion of the Court, the country people perceived that some tremendous thing was about to happen.

The Patriarch, having spoken, instantly took the golden box and, opening it, drew out a scroll of vellum, snowy white and sealed with a crimson seal, that hung from a ribbon of silk.

"Henceforth," he said, "our Empress, in earthly liberty but under heavenly control, must now follow where the Lord may will to lead her heart, unto her unknown spouse; for with this parchment, which I now consume in the flames, her oath vanishes from the records of earth and Heaven alike."

He gave the scroll to Eudocia and she placed it upon the brazier, where it quickly withered into ashes. All was done with the utmost celerity and no hands from the dazed throng were thrust to intervene, no voices lifted to question. Thereupon the people, having now grasped the meaning of this liberation and seeing future nuptials, future holli-

days, feasting, benefactions and great hours in the hippodrome, shouted very lustily.

There was much cheering and much concern. The old men grouped and bobbed their heads behind the throne; the priests and monks held together; the folk shouted "Eudocia Augusta!" "A King for the Queen!" "A husband for our Empress!"

Then the bronze coffer was opened and young Michael first dipped into the gold it contained, to send a shower flying for the peasants. Bardas, Gregoria, Euphrosyne and other young men and women helped him, while the people, scrambling for their gift, cried "Hail, Prince!" "Hail, Michael, son of Constantine!" "Hail, the Protostrator!"

Xiphilin spoke aside to Psellus and the Cæsar, who listened with amazement but displayed no wrath; the soldiers stood stiff and motionless, and many a gold piece tinkled against their armour where they stretched in a line between the Court and the struggling peasants.

Then the sun sank and purple shadows spread through the roseal light that still descended from above upon the flash and glitter, the swift surge and movement, the shower of gold pieces, the dust and din of tumbling, sprawling men and boys.

Radiant, calm, her thoughts with Romanus

Diogenes hidden by the shore, her heart envying
every drop of the brook that hastened to him,
Eudocia sat in the midst, while the pipes still
pierced, the shouting and the cymbals crashed.

C H A P T E R I V

THE CATHEDRAL

CHAPTER IV

THE CATHEDRAL

§ 1

THAT mighty basilica of Justinian, the Church of the Divine Wisdom, lay under a morning of cloudless blue, and the squat, sunbaked mass of it appeared to exude bubbles, where the gleaming domes hove up above the walls. St. Sophia's is best appreciated from within. Its sprawling plan robs the exterior of the majesty that belongs thereto; but from the side galleries, or within the nave its grandeur may be measured and its dignity felt. The last spoils of paganism adorned this fane and many shrines of obsolescent gods were robbed for its greater glory. We know also that Justinian himself, clad in a workman's blouse, laboured with his ten thousand workmen and master builders; while, when all slept save the watchmen, these guardians related how angelic hosts, answering to the impatience of Heaven, carried on the work by night. Nor should it be forgotten that an arch-

angel appeared to a lad who minded the labourers' tools, while they were at their mid-day meal, and bade him recall them to their toil. The boy hesitated to abandon his duty, but the spirit commanded and gave heavenly promise to watch faithfully in his place until he should return. Upon hearing these things the crafty Emperor instantly despatched the youth, sending him for life to the Cyclades; and thus the outwitted archangel still keeps his promise, and will hold watch so long as St. Sophia's shall stand.

On the ruins of previous churches rose this masterpiece. Four destructions preceded it, and as we view it on Eudocia's wedding day, five hundred years and more after its erection, a venerable age already marked the pile. It was a building already perhaps the most interesting in the world. Niketas Choniates, speaking of the dome, calls it "an earthly heaven; a throne of Divine magnificence, an image of the firmament created by the Almighty."

But this flower of Byzantine art looked otherwise than now, upon the morning of the royal nuptials. A cross crowned the prodigious fabric then, and the four marble minarets, to be raised by Islam in later centuries, had not yet leapt from earth at the conqueror's will.

To-day the western face of St. Sophia's was adorned with ten thousand silken flags and wreaths of flowers; a wide crimson cloth spread through the porches of the first and second narthex to the Court of the Médrésse, but at present this great space was empty, guarded by troops to the north and south, for the Factions had not yet been admitted.

The air was heavy with the hum of myriads moving in the city. Minor processions came and went along the swarming streets, but only a handful might hope to see the crown of the pageant, and those earliest afoot were already in the cathedral gardens and the Great Court. Thence to the western entry the way was barred; while the northern Court had been reserved and covered with gay awnings for the officers of State and those bidden to the occasion.

Soldiers stood together before the western entrance, or reclined in groups about the balustrade of the stairway. Their duty would be to pen the multitude right and left and set a fence of spears between them and the processions as they entered the cathedral.

Here, under the pillars of the first narthex, strolled three men already clad in wedding gar-

ments. Nicephorus, the Cæsar and Michael Psellus were met before the event, and while only the first knew the full outcome of the future, John Ducas and the historian understood from him that the wedding would be opposed and prevented upon the arrival of the bride. All were gorgeously attired for the ceremonial; the royal man glittered with precious stones and precious metal from his diadem to his heels; while his companions only shone less splendid.

Nicephorus spoke.

“It is thus with them,” he said. “I have now delivered to the Patriarch my ring, which sets Romanus Diogenes free. The Varangians have learned their leader returns to them, and though Xiphilin dreams that he has the Cappadocian and his forces behind himself and Bardas, we know otherwise. What shall be our reward, who thus have fooled the bulwark of Christian Europe, I dare not reflect.”

“He has earned destruction,” declared the Cæsar, “and deserves that it should fall now; when he stands at the summit of fancied security—safe with the army, and safe with the people, who welcome this outrage as promising more trivial pleasures for themselves.”

“And there lies a danger we ignore,” added Michael Psellus. “The people do most heartily applaud this marriage, and both Factions will oppose all who stand against it. Granted the army is omnipotent and comes between Bardas and Eudocia, what have we to offer Constantinople for its disappointment? The Empress, also, will need to be reckoned with. Now that she is free of her oath, the need for swift deposition, in my judgment, grows greater even than before.”

“She will not brook this bitter trial easily,” admitted the Cæsar, “or remain supine before the down-throw of her dreams. Moreover the nation will support her cause. To deal with Xiphilin may not be difficult if we have the army; but what if Romanus declines to move against the Empress? My thoughts are much with her and I mourn for the woman’s griefs. Indeed this may break her proud heart.”

“Freed from dread of threatened kingship, John Ducas breathes again,” commented Nicephorus. “Mourn her not, soft-hearted Cæsar. In her resolute spirit lies a precious possession—the touchstone of kings. Her sure determination has ever been to put the State before personal desire, and when the deadly danger and real meaning of her

love for Bardas are set before her presently, she will renounce him and bend to circumstance."

"It is well to prophesy, but who shall convince her on the very threshold of her longed-for happiness?"

"Not you, Michael, nor the Caesar, nor I. To-day, since the people's destiny is involved, we will let them cast the vote and strut, for once, the centre of the stage. What more seemly, for do they not love her and proclaim her their Mother? Our stroke shall be, then, to cast the burthen on them, knowing that under skilled inspiration, they will carry it which way we intend."

Psellus showed impatience.

"Still you play with ambiguous words and keep us groping," he answered. "The people have already chosen. They rejoice that Bardas shall be King and dote on him for the new toys he has already promised them. They will most surely stand beside the Patriarch."

"And the Senate also goes with Xiphilin to a man," explained John Ducas. "He has won the highest to his side with fabulous bribes and squandered the wealth of the Church in secret. He has forgotten nothing. He may, indeed, have won Romanus behind our backs."

"That, at least, should be beyond his power," replied Nicephorus; "and for the Factions and Senate, they are made alike, to barter the common weal for pleasure and pelf. They do not hide their mean ambitions. But keep steadfast hearts. To-day a comet should reign over us, for great omens are to come and you shall see twain mighty forces combining, to flow in one resistless flood. The Crown and People will move in harmonious unison; I see the certainty and greet already the result. Believe me, within this hour our self-sacrificing Eudocia shall weave a new and living bond between her heart and theirs."

Psellus shook his head.

"An idle fantasy. Did you not once remind Xiphilin that she was, after all, a woman? Now yourself you need to remember that. You assume that she will sacrifice all that she desires and hopes without a murmur, or a pang, and fling herself upon the people. But if you knew the awful love of women for those who win their hearts, you'd perceive that this nebulous idea—her goodwill to the mingled rout she calls her nation—must weigh as thistledown against it. Her love for Bardas is the life's blood in her veins; her affection for her people, one with the regalia and trappings of

royalty—donned for the public eye, and no more a part of the woman than her clothes."

"Most true," declared the Cæsar. "This appalling surprise and discomfiture may well unseat her reason and disgrace the day. She might even publicly renounce the Throne. And what is worst and most calculated to drown her spirit in gall appears in this: that Romanus Diogenes strikes the fatal blow."

"We strike the blow; he drives it home," said Michael Psellus.

"She is made of far sterner stuff than any man can guess at," answered Eudocia's ancient counsellor. "Believe me, we can trust her."

"Even so, you certainly cannot trust the people to oppose her. What if they insist on the Protopstrator?" asked Psellus.

Then the great bell of the cathedral beat noon, and Nicephorus reminded his companions that the tolling stood for a signal.

"We will get within for a space and address them presently before the Patriarch, when they have settled to their stations. As for your question, Michael Psellus, trust me a little yet, both of you—at least in this: to make such short work with our Protopstrator that he'll vanish like a leaf in the

wind before the breath of the public lungs. They love him not: only what he gives them. When did the people know gratitude?"

They retired into the cathedral and there still walked and talked, while the barriers fell in many streets and both the Factions, like a sea of billows, green and blue, came surging to the cathedral steps. They poured to their appointed places, the "Greens" upon one side, the "Blues" upon the other, while the soldiers lowered their spears to form a pale, waist-high, between the shouting thousands and the central ascent under its crimson carpet. For once the Factions were in holiday humour. Indeed, of late years their differences had become trifling, and the terrific battles and bloodshed of Justinian days were forgotten. Most vital questions now stood composed, and their rivalries centred in the hippodrome; their opposed champions were athletes. The Empress found herself well beloved by both parties, and they brought nothing but good temper to the present festival. They belied cheerfully across the intervening space, exchanged the names of great men and chaffed their mail-clad guardians, while they fluttered their scarves and displayed on a hundred banners of welcome their rival colours. Chiefly they cried for

“Bardas” with high approval. About the Prostator’s name centred such friendship and regard that it seemed already the crown was upon his head. Yet one who knew the mob and its heart from the experience of a lifetime, came now without fear to throw down the idol of the hour.

Eminent men ascended the steps and entered the cathedral. They were greeted, some with applause, some with hisses; and when their popularity belonged to one Faction alone, mingled cheers and groans awaited them as, impervious to either, they appeared.

Then the great central door of St. Sophia’s was thrown open and a concourse streamed out from under the shadows of the first narthex and grouped above the people. There came bishops, priests and monks—the prelates, bright as birds of paradise, in copes and mitres. A host of lesser dignatories surrounded them, while Xiphilin, shining in utmost splendour, followed under a towering cross of gems. Nicephorus, Psellus and the Cæsar were with him. They stood at his right hand, while he addressed the Factions.

Men and women had knelt at his entrance, and now all rose to their feet and listened to his harangue.

“Auspicious the hour and happy this people!”

began the Patriarch, “for here are we united in the hands of faith, loyalty and love, making common cause to bless our own good fortune. Yes, happy indeed are ye, for Heaven bestows upon your Kingdom one ye have long honoured, to share the life of our sovereign lady. My noble brother, Bardas, loves you too, and none before his time hath wrought so faithfully, so zealously to give the people joy. Oh, ye Factions, how little did I guess that when the Empress was released by Heaven of her bond, a radiant, human love should light her pathway to one of my own race! Yet now the ancient and unsullied line from which I spring is called both to the heights of Church and State, where, in the name of God, and ever jealous for His righteousness, as Priest and King, we dedicate ourselves unto your eternal and temporal welfare.”

The Factions cheered and manifested utmost enthusiasm. “Eudocia and Bardas!” they cried; and “Long life for the Patriarch!”

Psellus spoke to Nicephorus.

“How shall you change that concurrent and emphatic howl of one united will?” he asked; while Cæsar uttered a vain wish.

“If we could get the Factions in two minds,” he said.

“Nay; in one mind I would have them,” answered

the elder. "In one mind, so that they wheel together simultaneously, like birds that warp upon the air, when an impulse changes their direction and turns the flight of a thousand as the flight of one. Soon they shall dart to a new purpose, as shoals of shadow-frightened fishes dart—inspired by sudden fear of ill."

"Where is the syren voice can turn this multitude from its settled hope?" asked Psellus.

"A weather-cock answers one wind at a time—and that the last," replied the statesman.

Then Xiphilin approached.

"Speak to them, Nicephorus," he said. "They desire at all times to hear your voice."

"Why, so I will," answered the old man, and Xiphilin turned to the Factions.

"Give heed to your lifelong friend, the most noble Nicephorus," he cried, and the folk shouted "Nicephorus!" "Our friend!" "Hail, Nicephorus!"

The counsellor stood out before them, and Psellus, before he left his side, whispered a word.

"We'll guard you if they show their teeth."

But the old man feared nothing.

"My tongue has already saved my life," he said, "and may again. As for these, I fear them less than an old harper dreads the strings he strikes."

The mob is a lyre easily played upon, given mastery in the performer. If I waken discords blame me, not them."

He turned to the Factions, gravely saluting both "Greens" and "Blues" before he addressed them.

"Listen well to me, ye last holders of the glorious name of Rome; give heed before it is too late, lest infamy and statecraft turn this city to a prison-house, whose gaolers stamp out your liberties with iron-shod feet. To-day, even in this glad hour, our foes threaten to strangle all our feeble strength, and fear no more our answer than the wail of gnats. But shall our courage and our virtue also be stolen from us? Is our genius dead that we, whose feet have trampled Asia and left their stamp on all foreign earths, now whine as though we were children hurried off to bed because the sun has set? With you, men of the Factions, now it lies to answer and determine whether court intrigues and party interest, personal hatreds, frauds and dark diplomacy, hatched in corners out of sight, shall fatally wound your glorious destiny, befoul your patriot hopes, destroy your fame and bind you and your children hand and foot—defenceless slaves."

"Cease! Cease!" cried Xiphilin. "Are you mad, Nicephorus? What key is this to tune their

thoughts on Eudocia's wedding day? What perilous ground do you tread?"

"And fearlessly tread since I am shod with the shoon of candour," answered the other for all to hear. "Now I play no more on one man's heart, but seek to wake some echo of the old, mighty music from the hearts of the nation. The way that we shall tread lies upon firm, not perilous, ground, Patriarch of the East; the pitfalls gape on yours!"

He turned again to the people.

"To loyalty and manhood I address myself—to these who are Constantinople. Men, men, be deaf no more to the gathering moan and murmur at the very palace doors of your Byzantium; be blind no more to the despotism subtly planned by this unpriestly hierarch! All action is caged and shackled by his cunning. He plots away your sole and sacred heritage—free thought for all free people; and by the chains that he has forged in secret and to-day would publicly set upon the necks of us all, we're doubly bound, in mind and body. Thus shall we be an innocent prey to our enemies, who crouch at hand to make the tiger spring that lays us dead! No nation can survive such a double yoke; and if you still would save your liberty, then rise, all men

as one, deny and confound these nuptials, fight for liberty before it is too late!"

Immense commotion ran like a heaving wave through the multitude. About Xiphilin, now grown flaming and furious, the churchmen thronged; while the "Greens" and "Blues" listened in mingled alarm and doubt. Thus far Nicephorus had held them; but now, while many shouted approval, others sided with the Patriarch and cried "traitor" against him. These and himself now Xiphilin voiced in furious passion. He seemed disposed to rush upon Nicephorus, and threatened Heaven's aid to destroy him.

"Peace, profane and traitorous wretch!" he cried, "else will I call God's Hand upon thy throat."

Nicephorus made answer, but to the people, not the Patriarch.

"The traitor lies in the heart under that breast-plate," he replied. "Courtiers—priests—eunuchs—that is the servile pageant Empress Eudocia is bidden to keep—that is the foul stuff through which she has to step day by day. And that masquerade is all we show the world. We play at life; we abuse our womanish manhood and wander

in shameless dreams, like rustics through a fair gaping at shows. Come, ye listening men, tell me, tell me, where are the Nation's triumphs? In the hippodrome. Whence spring our heroes? Only from the circus. Where blaze our mightiest strokes of grandeur, splendour, power? In church; so that we find clergymen, gladiators and charioteers are all we can number to defeat Alp Arslan, when the Saracens come with fifty thousand spears. Where are our spears? Where is the sword of fire whose flash aforetime blinded half the world? Where are those men whose tramplings shook the earth and flung their thunder to the stars? Tell me where has vanished that ancient music? Tell me why you better love the blare of circus trumpets and the moan of organ reeds shaken by the wind? But such weak melodies reach not to any fainting province; they who thirst to hear salvation on the march will not be comforted with our hymns.

“The Franks are near—those barbarians, numberless and grim as death, whom the genius of a Charlemagne summoned from the antres of the North and made into a people. The Arabs, our old, inveterate foes, waste the Empire, slaughter your brothers like rats and drive your sisters into cursed slavery. The Latins hate our name and

hound us from their sight; the Ottomans trample the futile servants of Christ beneath their horses' hooves, laughing at us and whipping us for our cowardice. And now, while helpless, friendless, stricken, we stand the scorn of Christendom, there shines suddenly a light above our heads! We are not forgotten, my patient friends, and on celestial paths from Heaven, a new hope sweeps to warm our hearts and save our souls. The Empress is free; Eudocia Augusta lies in the hollow of her people's hand; and love of any human lover is nought to her compared with her love of that wide and glorious humanity which makes up her nation. Her first, deepest, purest passion is yours alone. And this I tell you and in her royal ear shall proclaim, that in these awful times, the Nation must be leader. It is for you, fathers of Constantinople, to stand upon your immemorial right and in your citizen wisdom see that for our Emperor we have a man—a man of regal might, a man of war, a man of sovereign strength to do your will and stem this tide of evil that flows in flood to sweep all away!"

Nicephorus with these easy platitudes was breaking down what opposition remained. His naked adulation tickled ten thousand ears. The people shouted "Nicephorus knows!" "We are the wise

ones!" "A man for Emperor!" "A mighty man to reign over us!"

The old fox proceeded :

"Most sagely spoken, and in you alone can she trust at this great hour; there is none else, for your deep voice and not the buzz of Court, or Church, echoes the eternal mandate. A man of men is our vital need, and woe betide the statecraft that would fob you off with shadows. You are right—'Blues' and 'Greens' both; and look to it that you have your way while yet you can; for fail now, and swift, bloody Nemesis will fling all in the dust."

"Who but a man shall wed her?" roared Xiphilin. "Where's the man to vie with Bardas in the nation's love and honour? Who is dearer to the hearts of all than he, thou traitor to the Throne?"

"Traitor?" asked Nicephorus. "Yes, high priest, to thee I am a traitor, but not to them, and not to their Empress. Shall this tame thing—this keeper of hawks and hounds be rayed in the sacred purple? Shall this spark with a curled beard, who plays a dulcimer and kisses women's fingers, win the smile of Mars and lop the heads of a million foes? Shall this poppinjay, so skilled in taming gazelles and love birds, know how to tame Alp

Arslan when he meets him face to face, but not rather ape Jehovah and show only his hinder parts? Shall Bardas, who pours ointment on his hair, pour fire upon the Saracens? Shall he, who bathes his carcase in milk and wine, while children are hungry and men thirsty, go forth in galling steel to drive off the wolves, whose howling upon stilly nights echoes its baleful promise along our walls? Shall mincing, faithless, shameless Bardas come as the dayspring of our hopes to lift the sun and wake the clarions of victory? Never while we are sane!"

At this significant moment fate smiled upon Nicephorus and brought the Procession of the Bridegroom.

§ 2

The Protostrator had followed his mind's meagre bent, and thinking to win all by the reminder of those pastimes for which he stood, brought along with him a train of circus folk—gladiators, charioteers of the "Green" and "Blue," boxers, acrobats and huge beasts, presently to fight and perish upon each other's horns and tusks for the pleasure of the mob. Elephants, tigers, rhinoceroses, chained and

guarded, came first and passed by the silent Factions. Then, when they were gone, followed the great performers and favourites, and presently there marched the bridegroom's bodyguard—a hundred little boys, long-haired, clad like parokeets and flashing in the sunshine.

Lastly walked Bardas alone—a very rainbow—in a long frock stiff with gems, a hat of gold upon his brow and a heavy wand of gold in his hand. But his pageant departed to bewildering silence that already made his knees shake; and as he ascended the crimson footcloth, his heart also shook, for instead of the thunder of applauding thousands he had counted upon, there came to his dumbfounded ear a deep-mouthed growl.

Then Nicephorus continued:

“See your salvation, Constantinople! Welcome your Emperor! Kneel to this doll who toddles to the Throne of the East!”

There came the answering roar: “No Bardas!” “Away with him!” “Give us a man!”

The Protostrator in acute alarm reached his brother's side, to find that all had gone amiss. But Xiphilin was quick to counsel.

“Treason is loose—treason to the Queen and her

affianced," he said. "Cæsar gapes like a stuck pig and this hoary knave is set to ruin our cause. They yell for a man; then show them you are a man! Draw your blade and strike down Nicephorus. He stands for nothing but himself. Let the Factions see you will not brook this villainy. Slay him before them, and they will do the rest."

His words fell over each other and he trembled with fury.

Nicephorus spoke.

"Aye, they will do the rest; therefore yield to a greater power than your own. Our people have heard and their eyes have seen. They do not will this puppet set upon the throne for you to pull the strings. Wise they are and most prevenient. They dare not see the tables of our law derided by a priest."

"What of the Empress then?" asked Bardas, his hand on his dagger, his heart fluttering under the gathering din of the Factions.

"She has yet to know her people's will," answered Nicephorus. "That, indeed, we all must know and reverence."

Bardas turned to his brother and spoke in his ear.

“We’re safe enough. Romanus Diogenes is free and with his legions. They will be here as swiftly as the Empress, to succour us and her.”

“Do we know that he will pardon her?” asked Xiphilin.

“We do,” answered Bardas. “I was with him in secret last night and have his oath that he is on her side.”

Then Michael Psellus joined in the perfidy of intrigue, cross lies and oaths. He had planned to side with the Patriarch until the last moment; though neither he nor John Ducas knew of this final throw and the larger scheme of Nicephorus, to let the Factions play out their comedy. Now the historian spoke to Xiphilin and still posed as his friend.

“Be of good hope. He is near. Under this uproar I hear the steady fall of the Varangians’ feet. He’ll strike at Eudocia’s nod, and silence this mad trash.”

The Factions were out of hand; they shouted for Nicephorus and howled against the bridegroom, where he stood among the churchmen. The guard held men and women back with difficulty, and here and there they smote with flat swords to quell the ringleaders.

“A man for Emperor!” roared the mob. “Bardas

shall not reign!" "The Patriarch shall not reign over us!" "No priest for Emperor!"

At the height of the confusion the royal trumpets thrilled and restored peace. Their silvery scream grew nearer, and the Procession of the Bride approached.

For the Empress remained a generous and friendly greeting. "Eudocia Augusta!" "Our Queen!" "Our Mother!" began to shout the people.

Meantime Xiphilin doubted and answered Psellus.

"Who can be sure that Romanus is loyal? It was he—this wolf in sheep's clothing—who yielded me the ring to set him free."

"The biter's bit," replied Psellus. "A mightier wolf than he shall consume him, and soon his venomous carcass will writhe under a thousand swords, since that coward fears to strike."

He pointed at Bardas, but the Protostrator was far beyond any shame at personal insults. His ears strained for the armies; his terrified eyes thirsted for Romanus.

"When he comes we will withdraw with Eudocia into the cathedral, and he can hold the populace at the door until we're wed," he told them.

Then he uttered an exclamation of relief.

"The armies move!" he cried. "Hold together a minute longer and we are saved."

The distant tramp deepened and all heard great forces marching.

A tremor seized Bardas. He clutched the shoulder of his brother.

"My God! If she has changed her mind I shall lose my head, Xiphilin."

"She has not changed her mind. It is these dregs of the city, stirred by him, that threaten this dangerous evil. It is he and you, who lacked manhood to slay the old ruffian, who are equally to blame."

"Eudocia Augusta! Eudocia, Empress!" "Welcome our Mother!" "God bless our Queen!" So shouted the Factions as the Bride's Procession poured out before the cathedral steps.

In an open litter came Eudocia with a guard of Court soldiery about her—giants, every man. She was clad in white and moved like a woman made of pearl. The tiara was upon her head, and in her hands the orb and sceptre. Girls flung a shower of flowers before her feet as she alighted, and the crimson cloth was soon white with a snow of blossoms. Her son, Michael, walked beside her as her own page, and behind them came fifty maidens

all in azure, wearing golden chaplets from which floated rosy veils. Following them walked Irene and Gregoria, Maria and Euphrosyne, with many matrons and noble women; but Theodora was ill of a fever and could not come. Senators and Patriicians crowded upon this company, and when the Patriarch descended to meet Eudocia, the Factions, with one hurricane shout of greeting, flung out their scarves on either side of the great stairway in a whirlwind of blue and green. Joy and welcome was in the thunder of their cheering, and for a moment it seemed that Bardas had been forgot. But still the people cried: "A man for Emperor!"

It was at this moment that Michael Psellus took his opportunity to quit the priestly forces and range himself where the Cæsar stood beside Nicephorus.

And then the truth burst upon Eudocia's senses and she revealed amazement at an ugly sound which greeted her betrothed as he thrust forward after his brother. She had reached the upmost step and welcomed Bardas, when the harsh peal struck her.

"Down with him!" "Down with Bardas!" "Xiphilin shall not reign!" yelled the mob, its many eyes on Nicephorus.

Eudocia started, then stood still, as though suddenly turned into a glittering white stone. She moved at last and handed the orb and sceptre to a chamberlain. Then she addressed the Protostrator.

“What is here, Bardas? Why this frosty welcome? Do they not love you?”

“I thought they did,” he answered. “But yonder aged serpent you set free has been pouring poison in their ears.”

“And into their hearts,” added Xiphilin. “Here, on holy ground, he preached sedition and opposed their love for us all.”

“Nicephorus!” cried Eudocia in a sudden silence, while every eye searched her.

“Aye, that villain damned to the uttermost hell of Judas and black Brutus!” answered Xiphilin. “See now how the Cæsar ranges beside him, and Psellus—our friend till you appeared—has also gone over. Slay him now! Bid them destroy the man before your people and cleanse the infected air. Only his death will convince this besotted multitude that he is false. Bid Bardas draw and smite him under Heaven’s avenging eye!”

Eudocia exhibited profound astonishment, confusion and grief.

"Then is Nicephorus not our friend?" she asked.

"Your bitterest enemy on earth—the devil that would bring down Church and Throne together."

All waited for Eudocia's answer, and she spoke clear and loud.

"If that be so, you, Bardas, who have come to wed your Queen, draw instantly your dagger and slay her foe."

But the craven was powerless.

"I—I—cannot send his sinful soul to hell. I have never slain a man."

"Then slay yourself—that's not to slay a man!" piped a thin, acid voice. It was Saurus, and the people, seeing his familiar figure in holiday blazon, cried approval. "Kill yourself!" "Away with Bardas!" "Eat him!" they shouted; and "Long live the Lizard!" bellowed the "Greens," who held the dwarf of their Faction.

The march of the army sounded louder. A drift of white dust came before.

"Kill him and strike him dumb!" urged Xiphilin; then Nicephorus spoke.

"Haste, Bardas, haste!" he said. "I wait my death. Fear not; the road is short through a gate of lean ribs to this old heart."

But he would not strike. Instead he cursed.
“God of Light, am I an executioner? Call slaves
and strangle him!”

The troops came onward, swinging into the great blazing square before St. Sophia’s. Company after company they strode—masses of men under their officers, armed with swords and bucklers, beneath the banners of battle.

Bardas broke off.

“Romanus comes!” he shouted, and again Eudocia, keeping within her part, revealed astonishment.

“‘Romanus comes?’” she echoed. “Who has dared to free Romanus Diogenes?”

“Ask that knave,” answered Xiphilin. “He set the soldier free for treachery; and let him reap the first harvest of these loyal swords. Fear thou not Romanus, Majesty. He will support the right against this man—aye and against the Caesar too. Hasten forward—enter with Bardas and trust the general and his Varangians to hold back this rag-tail rout.”

“What say you?” she asked. “John Ducas a traitor—Constantine’s brother a traitor to my son? And our people our enemies? You are fallen into

madness, Patriarch. Let but a soldier hurt one of our children and he wounds Eudocia Augusta."

A silence followed, while every man and woman of the thousands crowded upon that scene watched the great battalions wheel and halt. To right and left they massed ; then through their midst, on foot, with a dozen of his officers, came Diogenes—a mighty figure in blue steel, armed as though for war. Sternly he swept forward, his black-crested helmet some inches above the best that strode with him. The crowd roared a doubtful greeting and many trembled, both high and low ; for the dullest had perceived that here, before this sudden advent of irresistible, armed power and discipline, diplomacy and the voice of the mob were alike of no avail. The key of the situation lay wholly with Romanus, and fear began to instil the many hearts that knew of his imprisonment. But the soldiers were lost in joy at their leader's return. There was no anger in their faces. It seemed they bore the State no grudge.

§ 3

The troops and officers saluted Eudocia where now she stood alone on the topmost stair. Behind

her was the darkness of the great central entrance, now thrown open. Upon her right hand huddled Xiphilin, Bardas, the monks and priests, the acolytes and sacred emblems. At her left, equally withdrawn from her, were Nicephorus, Psellus and the Caesar, with little Michael Ducas beside Saurus and the women.

Again the scarves of the Factions danced and their lungs gave out a mighty roar as Romanus walked up the stairway.

He stopped before Eudocia and once more saluted.

“How comes it that Romanus Diogenes, at our command cast into prison for grave faults, is free?” she asked, speaking slowly and shutting her eyes to hide her delight.

He bowed his head, then lifted it and spoke that all might hear.

“On this great day, Eudocia Augusta, your armies hungered to share the universal exultation; and I have heard, Divine One, that it was your will for a brief hour to let me look upon your face again. A prisoner I come, and if upon this day, so rich in hope for all your Empire, you cannot pardon me, then I return under seal of my unbroken faith to Marmora. Or free, or bound, I love you with an absolute unquenched loyalty; I only pray to devote

my life to your cause and, if need be, lose my life to maintain your sacred throne."

The Factions proclaimed their satisfaction and boldly called upon the Queen to pardon her general; but still it seemed that she was doubtful. Her part was now to yield a little of her own vast popularity into the safe keeping of Romanus.

"Audacious one!" she said. "But if my people love you——"

Then, Xiphilin, on thorns to get the affianced pair to the altar, spoke vehemently.

"Nay, pardon him without demur, Majesty, and end this most dangerous farce. Peril lurks in it, therefore crown the hour with blessed mercy, forget the past and win the vital succour of this honest man. Never have you needed honesty about you as at this moment, while knaves share the very air you breathe and spread pestilence upon your innocent subjects."

"Hear us, then," she said. "And let Romanus Diogenes also hear. Ever ready to heed your united voices, we are pleased to restore our general to his heroic and devoted troops, that he may lead their might against the enemy. To-day let them and him and his brave leaders rejoice with all of us, and soon we promise him a grateful nation's aid —wholehearted and ungrudging—to strengthen his

needs and fit him for his tremendous task. Henceforth we trust Romanus Diogenes, much value him, and take his fearless love as an earnest of his pains to fight and conquer for our realm."

The Factions shouted approval and the troops added a strange quality to the din, for they made a hollow thunder by beating on their shields with their swords.

Then Romanus, having first knelt, and risen again, replied :

"Before anointed Majesty I make my vow to do her will with all my wit and strength and soul. From her royal inspiration her armies, led by a thousand faithful men, of whom I am but one, shall win such might that soon her myriad foes must be her slaves."

Eudocia, now smiling, spoke in joyous tones :

"So be it, Romanus. You have answered graciously and we are well content. Now to our nuptials you are bidden, since, guided by God's angel, Xiphilin, our reverend Patriarch, hath set me free to wed at the dictates of my heart."

She turned and again Bardas stepped to her side ; but though he approached boldly, his feet soon dragged before the ominous yell of anger that broke from both Factions. They were in earnest and had

not forgotten. Rage made their voices ugly as they bawled again: "A man for Emperor!" "Bardas shall not reign!"

Then Eudocia, waving the bridegroom back from this challenge, addressed herself once more to the people.

"Answer us," she said. "Do you not will that Bardas, the brother of your Patriarch, shall be your King?"

Xiphilin was at her elbow while the Factions shouted their reply.

"Bandy no words! Be swift. What madness is this, to cast your destiny to them?"

"Nay," she said. "Mad, or sane, I must know. See, they love him not. There is no voice lifted for him."

"You court a monster," he hissed under his breath, his eyes on Nicephorus. "When did power defer to the passion and ignorance of the mass? They only echo that accursed traitor. Slay Nicephorus; then turn from them and bid Diogenes hold them here. Take my brother's hand swiftly and go with him. They will snarl awhile, but forget all when herded in the hippodrome: In God's name do not play with this danger."

"My destiny lies with my people," she answered

loudly, and the Factions roared again their parrot cry: "A man for Emperor!" "Xiphilin shall not reign!" "Away with Bardas!"

The Protostrator had fallen from fear into rage. He issued an order to Romanus.

"Slay this old jackal first, then sweep the Factions back!" he cried. "Order a legion to set barriers between them and us."

But the great man in steel ignored him and turned to Eudocia.

"Is it Majesty's will I drive them off?" he asked.

"Touch them and you destroy me," she answered, then faced the crowd, while John Ducas and Psellus stared to see emerge at last the true meaning of all that was done, and Nicephorus, intent on every word, smiled in his heart at the royal pupil's accomplishment. Each syllable, each gesture was as perfect as wit and love could make it.

"These men and women are myself!" declared the Empress, sweeping her hands and arms to right and left. "Their will is mine—my only pride and content is to be in their true hearts. There only my throne is set, and there I reign, or nowhere. Let them hear how well I trust them; let this people feel that I am theirs—their mother, their sister, their Queen! For me the Factions do not exist; I

recognise and reign for one united people, to whom I am precious, while to my heart they are dearer far than crown and orb and sceptre. Let them speak fearlessly in this great moment, tell me their thoughts and declare their omnipotent will, whether widowed I shall remain and rule alone, or, at their wish, learn to love one whom they love. And, if that be so, and they crave an Emperor, let them declare him, so that I may know which way their spirit turns!"

The Factions burst upon this speech with a reverberation of many cheers. "Eudocia trusts us!" they shouted. "We are the wise ones!" "Eudocia Augusta loves us!" "She is our Mother!"

And then, acting no more, but deeply moved by this emotional display, Eudocia called them to come to her, bade her guards lower their spears and, for the first time in Byzantine history, suffered the folk at the hem of a royal garment.

"Closer come!" she cried, as the women of the people, awed to silence, but braver than their men, went forward. "Come, ye women, come men also—all are dear to us."

Then she dropped royalty and spoke in her own person, while a hundred courtiers trembled to see the "Greens" and "Blues" flow close about her.

She seemed lost awhile in the flying scarves of

the Factions, and her tall, white shape sank in the billows of blue and green. But they only surrounded and made clumsy obeisance; they did not touch the hands she outstretched to them.

“Choose my husband for me!” she said. “Raise to my side your sovereign choice, my people—a man worthy of your throne and made royal by your vote. Then I shall tell this glorious wonder to the world: that I had my husband at my people’s gift!”

Lives hung in their answer, but the comedy was safely played. As Nicephorus had prophesied, the last word must be spoken by Constantinople, and it was the word that the old dramatist meant should be spoken.

Care and subtlety went to his own attack and he had very truly paved for Eudocia’s feet; but she and Romanus also played their parts to perfect purpose, and the three of them now won their hazard with triumph.

Nicephorus had palmed Diogenes upon both Factions, and with one consent they volleyed his name till the great cliffs of the cathedral front throbbed and echoed with it.

“A soldier for Emperor!” was the cry; “Romanus

Diogenes!" "Romanus Diogenes for Emperor!" "Eudocia and Romanus!"

Then, after this terrific explosion of a united will, whereto the soldiers had added their desire, there fell a wonderful silence.

Xiphilin and his brother stood frozen. But the Patriarch now saw all, and while Bardas streamed sweat and gaped with a fallen jaw, Xiphilin, looking forward, directed his people to retreat into the cathedral. His mind ran on sanctuary, yet he knew that not St. Sophia's nor any corner of the Kingdom could offer safety now.

Then Eudocia spoke with a resigned dignity.

"Ye will and I obey. So must it be. Amen!"

She bent her head to the people, who preserved a moment's silence before the climax of their achievement; and then she summoned Romanus, who stood apart among his leaders.

"What sayest thou, Cappadocian?" she asked.

"This I say," he answered: "Before the Face of Almighty God, I will dedicate my being to yourself, your son, and the dynasty."

He stood with his eyes upon the Empress, then turned to her women and spoke again.

"Michael, son of Constantine, come to me!"

The small, white-clad figure of Michael stole out nervously and Romanus took his hand.

“Your father was my King,” he said, “and your future crown shall be sacred while I live to fight for it.”

The Patriarch, his brother, and the churchmen had already retreated into the cathedral, and unobserved the great doors were closed within the second narthex. But they yielded swiftly enough to attack, and then a tumultuous company swept into the building—the soldiers and Factions mingling. Many of the Varangians and their centurions surrounded Eudocia and Romanus, to lift them together upon a platform of their shields. Thus they were borne into St. Sophia’s.

A sudden peal of bells broke out overhead, while a great organ and instruments of brass rumbled and blared together within.

The church was quickly filled and thousands remained outside.

Then, by a little western entrance secluded from observation, hastened the Patriarch in a black cassock, shorn of his robe and mitre; and after him followed the figure of Bardas. Two old monks alone supported them; and rough fellows insulted the Patriarch, while they stopped the Protostrator.

He screamed, but Xiphilin hastened forward, while a gang of the "Greens" knocked off the hat of Bardas and laughed, when, in terror of death, he offered them his fine feathers to let him go. They stripped him, and in his under garments he rushed on and overtook his brother.

Time alone would reveal their temporal punishment; but for Xiphilin no mortal ingenuity might plan a deeper anguish than the hour had brought that saw him fallen. Bardas rubbed his bruises, and his tears fell, while already in thought he trembled for his eyes and his nose.

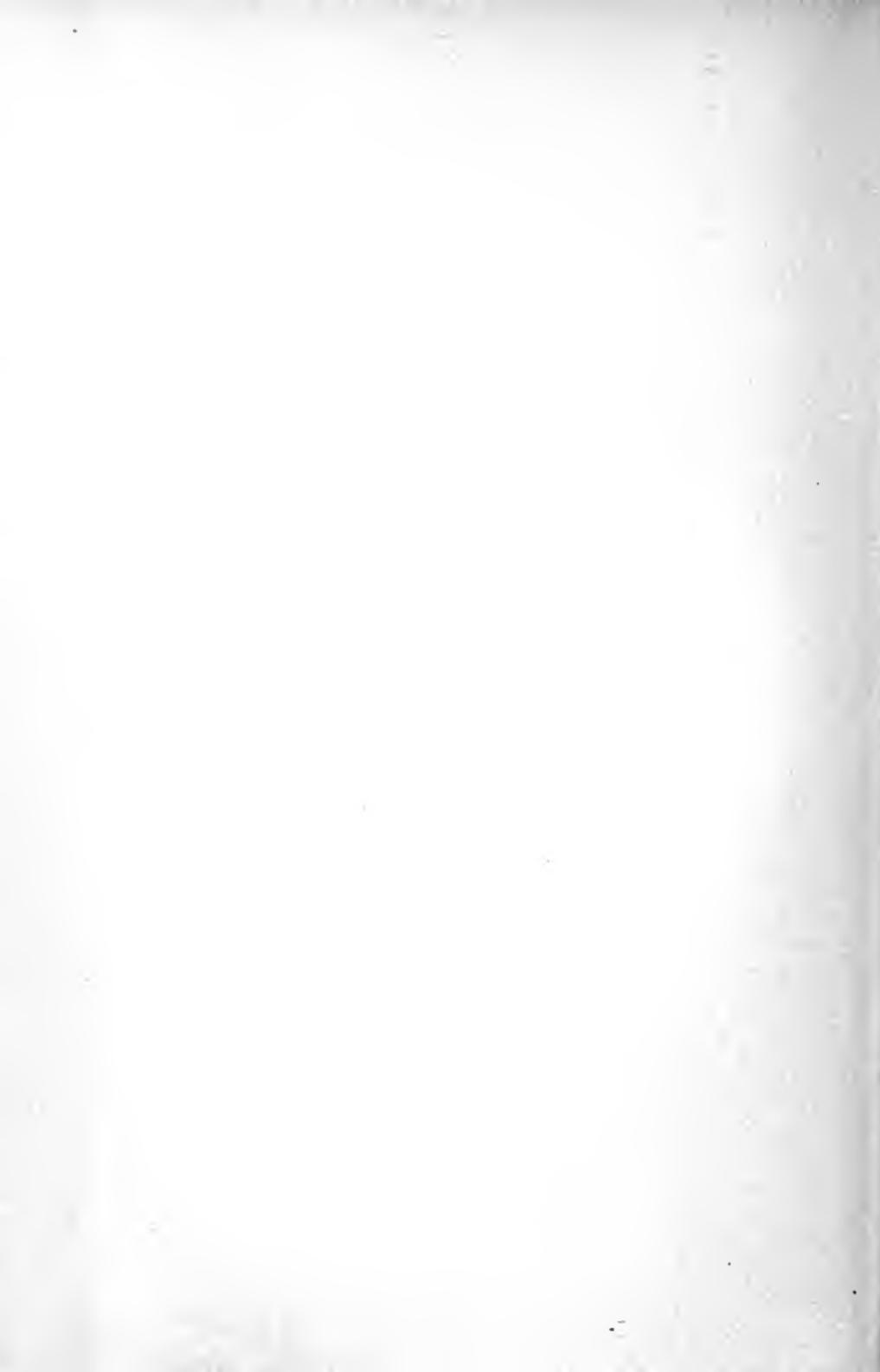
"It is a dream," he gasped. "We shall awaken, for such things cannot be."

"We have awakened," answered the other, "and only death heals such an awakening. Depart from me, accursed shadow of a man, and see my face no more. One thrust of your dagger had kept the world stable; but now you have cast our race into outer darkness for all time, so that the world will ever scorn my name and spit on yours."

A great choir chanted in the cathedral and the music rolled out over the heads of the crowds. Through the open doors, where light of many colours fell from above and shot the gloom, they could see, dwarfed by distance, the uplifted altar

and the throng before it. A thousand waxen candles made golden haze of the incense smoke, and a new Patriarch, attired in the robes fallen from Xiphilin's shoulders, stood above the kneeling pair with his hands uplifted over their heads.

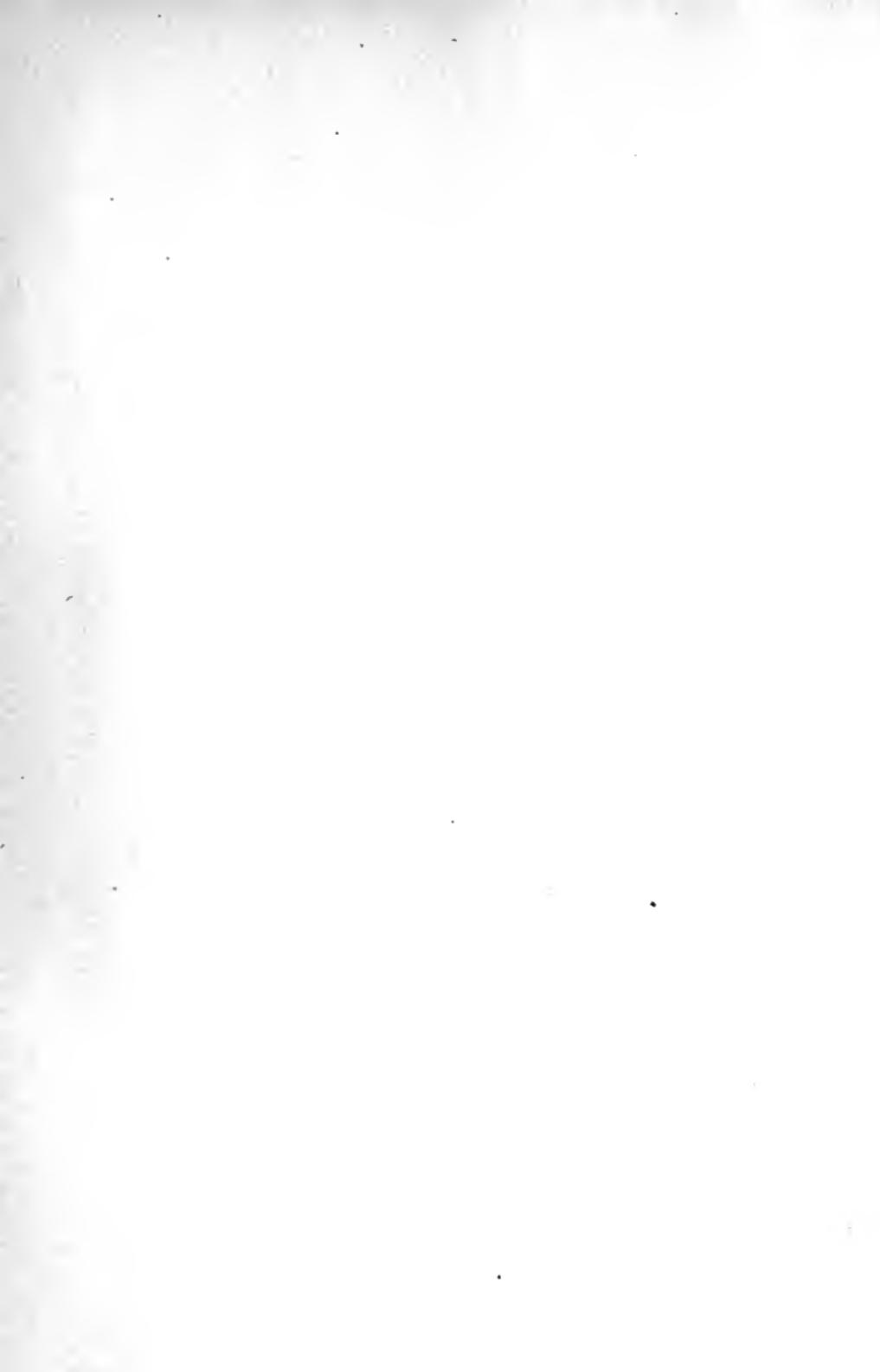
Then on that royal comedy, at once so barbaric and unreal, so gorgeous, so massive without, so puny and transient within, the curtain fell. Time was already spinning the thread and weaving the pattern of solemnities to follow, and Fate, having thrust a comic interlude upon Byzantine history, instantly opened graver themes and composed a spectacle more tremendous. That also was succeeded in its turn by mightier pageants of destruction and despair, before the drama of the Eastern Empire darkened to its ending and the generations of Christian Constantinople vanished as a tale that is told.

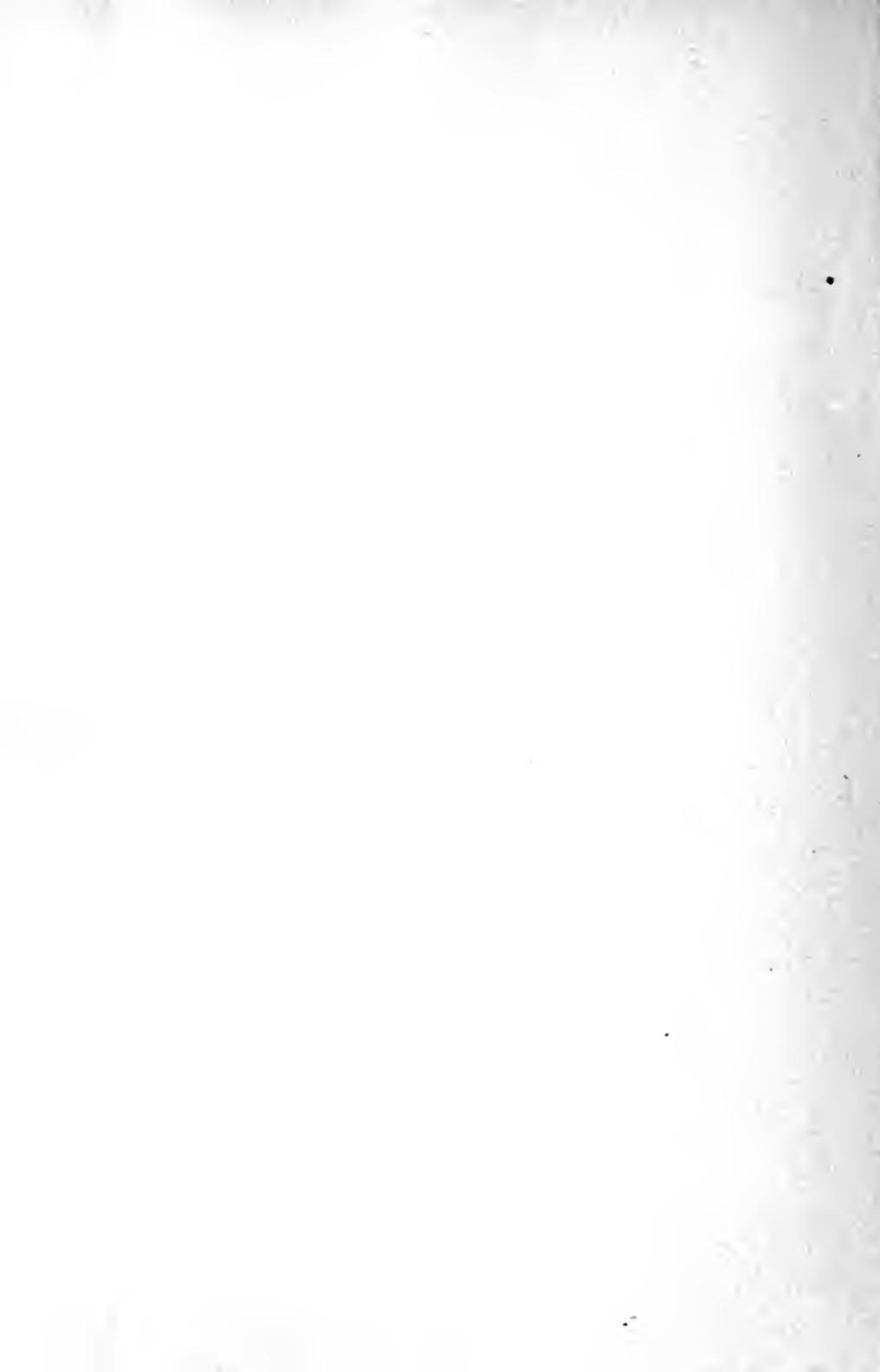














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